THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

POLICY REVIEW

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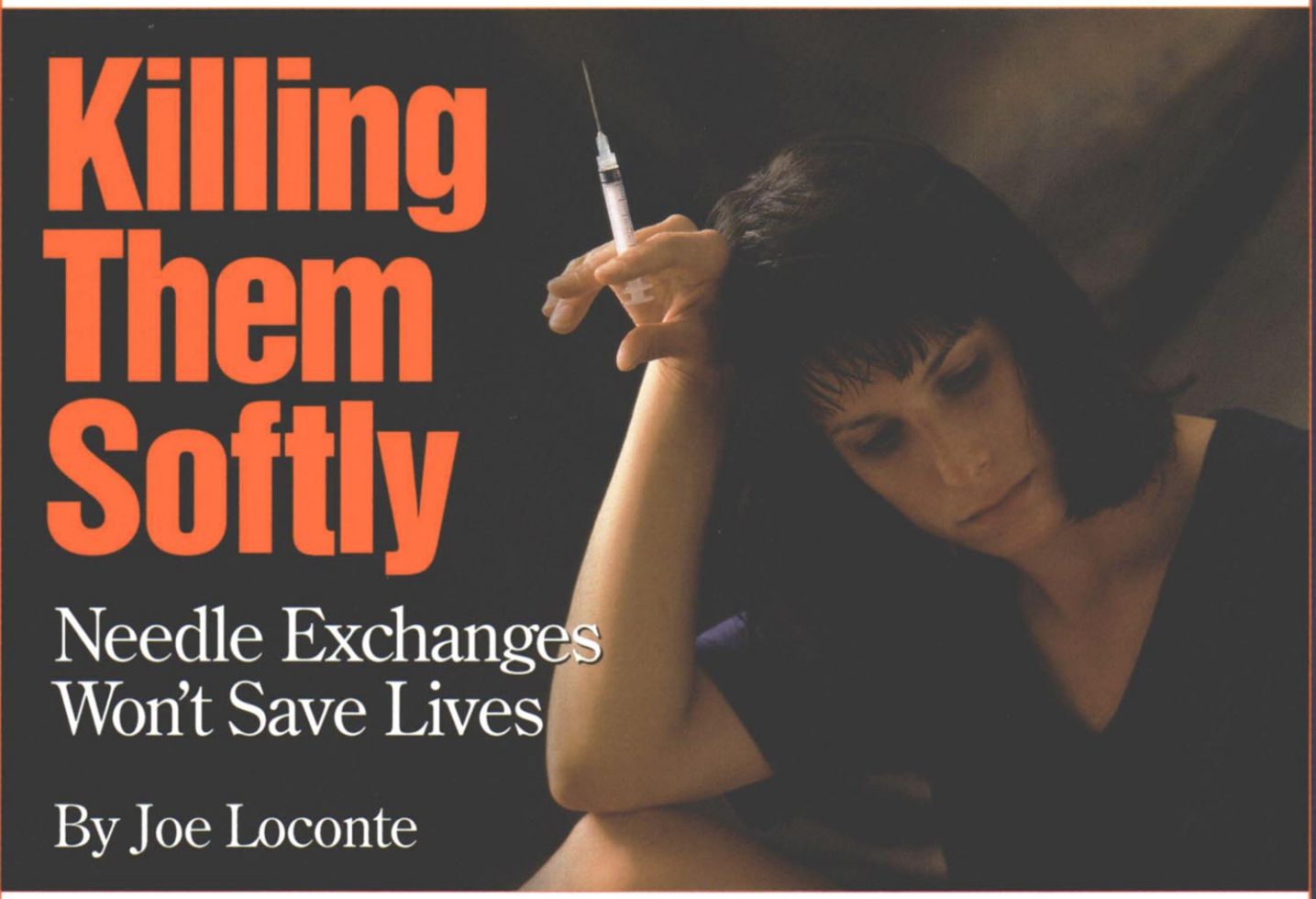

Killing Them Softly

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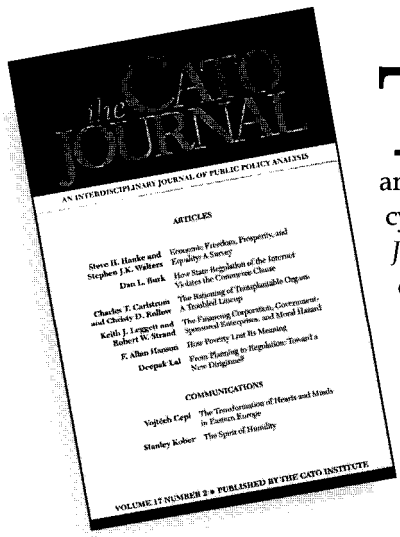
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Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship illuminates the families, communities, voluntary associations, churches and other religious organizations, business enterprises, public and private schools, and local governments that are solving problems more effectively than large, centralized, bureaucratic government. Our goal is to stimulate the citizenship movement—chronicling its success stories, exposing its obstacles and opportunities, and debating the policies that will best invigorate civil society.

American citizenship combines freedom with responsibility. These are the two great themes of modern conservatism, and they build on the best of the American tradition. Americans come from all races, all nationalities, all religions. Americans are united in citizenship not by common ancestry but by a common commitment to the political principles of the United States: the Constitution, the rule of law, the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Americans are united, too, by the common duties of citizenship: the obligation to protect our country from foreign enemies, to take care of our own families, to participate actively in civic life, to help our neighbors and communities when they are needy, and, in turn, not to take advantage of others' generosity when we can take care of ourselves.

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"It would be a sad thing if the religious and moral convictions upon which the American experiment was founded could now somehow be considered a danger to free society . . . ."

—Pope John Paul II

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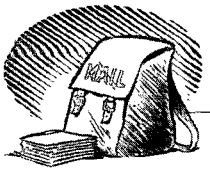

Correspondence

Hospitable Death

To the Editor:

"Hospice, Not Hemlock," by Joe Loconte, (Mar.–Apr. 1998), was informative and interesting but incomplete. So far, hospice has done an exemplary job of caring for cancer-ridden patients who live in middle-class communities and have family members who can provide primary care. This model, unfortunately, does not yet serve people who are poor or have other life-threatening illnesses, such as emphysema and HIV/AIDS.

Americans for Better Care of the Dying (ABCD), a nonprofit group, aims to fill that gap. We were created by Dr. Joanne Lynn, the principal co-investigator on the Robert Wood Johnson SUPPORT study, which demonstrated that poor communication between patients and doctors can have a devastating effect on care at the end of life.

ABCD's mission is three-fold: To educate the public and health-care professionals, to advocate government policies for good end-of-life care, and to create networks among the many organizations that serve the seriously ill and the dying. Our monthly newsletter, *Exchange*, describes programs and policies that affect end-of-life care. We recently described the work of the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco, which offers hospice-like care to people with AIDS who were previously homeless, and the Malachi House, a Cleveland program for homeless, dying people. These programs, and hundreds like them, strive each day to improve the life of the dying and to change the culture in which we die.

Janice Lynch Schuster
Americans for Better
Care of the Dying
Riva, Md.

To the Editor:

The scope and depth of Joe Loconte's analysis of hospice care in a few short pages is a credit to him and your publication.

I have had the opportunity to participate in interdisciplinary team meetings where all aspects of easing a patient's suffering are discussed and a plan of action to address each aspect is drawn up. The implementation of that plan does make a difference. Although I have only been with Hospice of St. Francis since November, I have seen patients enter hospice expressing a desire to end their lives and eventually come to embrace life as fully as possible until they died. Your article succinctly portrayed that reality.

Bruce Wolters
Executive Director
Hospice of St. Francis
Titusville, Fla.

Standards, the Latest Fad

To the Editor:

As I struggled through my second year of teaching elementary school in Texas, I found it hard to read Tyce Palmaffy's article, "The Gold Star State" (Mar.–Apr. 1998), which detailed the "success" of the standards and testing philosophy. Standards have been touted as education's messiah, but the exact opposite is true.

First, teachers are forced to teach to the test. I have been told to forget about teaching anything that isn't on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Why? Because last year's third-grade scores were low, so I need to concentrate on teaching these kids how to take this standardized test. To argue that the state has "decentralized" and now allows individual districts and schools to determine their own teaching strategies is silly. We must teach the content of the test exactly as it will be tested.

Second, accountability rests mainly with teachers and principals, not with students or district administrators. There are no real penalties for students who do not pass the TAAS test. This leaves students in a situation where they have no real incentive to take the test seriously, especially in the lower grades. And districts' central offices have many people doing "administrative" tasks who do not face any pressure to perform, unlike teachers and principals.

Third, the accountability system rewards mediocrity and degrades hard work. Students take a test each fall to determine their level of achievement. In many affluent schools, it isn't uncommon for 70 to 85 percent of the students to pass, meaning only 30 percent or less of the students have not reached an acceptable level five months before the actual test.

By contrast, my sixth-grade students were lucky to be working on a third- or fourth-grade level. In the fall, only 30 percent of my students passed. By the end of the year, only 40 percent of the students reached the passing level. My hard work was considered mediocre at best. But in analyzing the test scores from the year before, I realized that all of my students had made great strides, some as much as a 125 percent higher proficiency level than the year before. They had learned a year's worth of knowledge plus 25 percent more. But my scores were not looked upon favorably. By rating schools based on actual scores and not progress, the Texas Education Agency does little to identify good teaching.

Fourth, the pressure on educators is so great that it creates a horrible working environment, in which teachers feel they need to cheat by asking students who are going to fail to stay home. It causes teachers to ignore the needs of special-education students who are exempt from the test. It makes us emphasize something we don't view as a legitimate evaluation of our work. It's making me look for another profession.

Standards don't raise parental involvement levels. They don't make students want to come to school. They don't make students value academic performance. They don't make up for the two- to three-year deficit many students have coming into school. They fall well short of realistic goals for students who want to be ready to tackle the job market or college. Real change comes when individual schools address individual problems in unique and innovative ways. Real change means giving them the freedom to do so, not handcuffing them with useless tests and a watered-down curriculum.

Eric Wyatt
Muncie, Ind.

To the Editor:

Texas's improvement is admirable, but as long as schools remain in the hands of government, the accountability movement

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will merely be treating symptoms and not the illness. To understand the surgery our education system needs, one must consider how children's needs are best met.

Excluding spiritual and emotional matters, which only parents can address, the actual physical and intellectual needs of a child consist mainly of six items: food, clothing, shelter, medical care, recreation, and education. In the United States, the first five items—food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and recreation—are unquestionably the best in the world. We have access to goods and services of the highest quality at the lowest prices. Compare these items to education, in which the United States consistently lags behind the rest of the world. What's the difference?

Or rather, who's the difference?

Who delivers food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and recreation to us and our children? Competitive markets. Who delivers education? Government.

Why do we rely on the free-enterprise system, the best delivery system known to man, to supply everything children need except education? If we really want to implement honest reform in our schools, let's break the government's monopoly on education and turn it over to the competitive marketplace. Only then will our schooling be as good as the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the homes we inhabit.

Jim H. Hill Jr.
Winston-Salem, N.C.

Crime in the Schools

To the Editor:

I am a former mathematics teacher from San Antonio, Texas. Last year, I quit in disgust after nine years in the San Antonio school district. I would like to communicate my support for Thaddeus Lott ("No Excuses," Jan.–Feb. 1998) and for direct instruction. It has worked everywhere it's been tried. What is happening virtually everywhere else is criminal.

William J. Braund
Clifford, Ind.

Simply Shocking

To the Editor:

Steven Hayward's recent article on welfare reform ("The Shocking Success of Welfare Reform," Jan.–Feb. 1998) was a devastating critique. It conclusively proved that we must find an alternative to the statist, socialist welfare solution to poverty. It proved that there are no programs more effective than the free market.

Not only has the current tax-and-spend program failed to elevate the less fortunate, it has trapped them where they are. Misguided—albeit warm-hearted—liberals have not only failed to weave an adequate safety net, they have managed to convince welfare recipients that our social programs are a way of life.

David A. Pendleton
Republican Minority Whip
Hawaii House of Representatives
Honolulu, Hawaii

The Next Conservative Frontier

To the Editor:

The infrequency of analyses such as Steven Hayward's ("Broken Cities," Mar.–Apr. 1998) has been one cause of the urban disasters he recounts. Conservatives have ignored cities for years, giving liberals an unchecked monopoly on remedies for their decline. To curb the resulting excesses of the Left, the cities must become, in Hayward's words, "the next major frontier for conservative policy."

We can heed his prudent warning against "conservative social engineering" by regarding cities not as laboratories for government testing of social theories, either liberal or conservative, but as businesses with a product to sell: their location. Cities must compete for the customers, businesses, and residents they are losing.

Give families and job creators what the suburbs offer: A secure environment, good schools and public services, and reasonable taxes and regulations. Then market city neighborhoods and business areas as skillfully as developers market new suburban subdivisions, business parks, and shopping malls.

The recent spread of a Republican liberalism in the suburbs—taking the form of expanding government, high property taxes, land-use regulations that can be even more stifling than those in the city, and citizen protests that stifle growth and development—offers cities an opening. As suburbs become ever more expensive and hostile to business and growth, cities could put out the welcome mat by adopting Hayward's reforms and aggressively selling themselves. This could be a magnificent competitive opportunity for conservatives—and for cities.

John Gann Jr.
Glen Ellyn, Ill.

A Logic Lesson

To the Editor:

I find many of *Policy Review*'s articles provocative, smart, and worthwhile, but I found much of Norval Glenn's "A Textbook Case of Marriage-Bashing" (May–June 1998) silly at best and offensive at worst.

Rather than dissect the article paragraph by paragraph, let me focus on one mistake in logic. Glenn writes, "Because marriage appears regularly in every known human society, it must be beneficial to the individual or society or both." I am not certain where Glenn got his statistics, but I would be very surprised if, somewhere in the history of civilization, a society did not exist where marriage did not occur regularly.

That notwithstanding, I can hardly imagine a sillier argument than stating that because something has occurred everywhere, it must therefore be beneficial. I am certain that crime has existed everywhere, yet I cannot believe that Glenn would seriously argue, therefore, crime must be good.

Ellen Rosenfeld
via e-mail

Correction: In "Mrs. Colehill Thanks God for Privatized Social Security" (May–June 1997), author Stephen Glass accurately described a private Social Security system that has greatly benefited employees of three Texas counties since it was started in 1981. However, *Policy Review* regrets to inform its readers that quotations from three individuals who putatively benefited from this private system, including Wendy Colehill, appear to be fabrications.

Letters to the Editor

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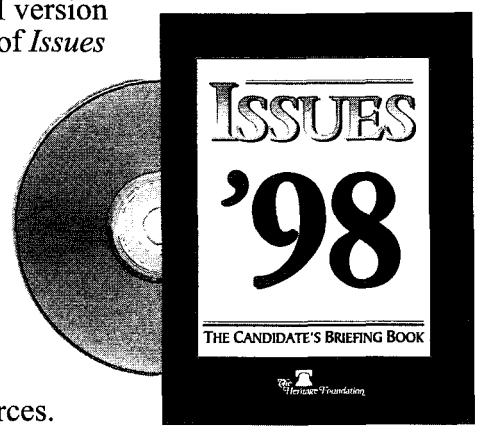

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Home Front

Grand Rapids Erects A Civic Tent for Marriage

by Roger Sider

Roger Sider is a staff psychiatrist and the executive director of the Pine Rest Family Institute, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, has long been known as a family-friendly community with conservative values, but this city of 500,000 has not escaped the cultural forces buffeting the institution of marriage. The surrounding area of Kent County recorded 2,783 divorces last year, more than half the number of marriages in the same period. More than 25 percent of the county's children grow up without their fathers and mothers married and living under the same roof.

Business leaders, university presidents, and attorneys join the clergy in crafting a community marriage policy.

These figures got the attention of a group of local citizens: a mayor, a pastor, a social worker, and myself, a psychiatrist. Each of us had become alarmed at the mounting toll exacted by the erosion of marriage in western Michigan, especially on children. In fall 1996, we set out to establish a community marriage policy, modeled on programs enacted in 86 cities across the nation, to give children a better chance of growing up in stable, two-parent homes.

Most other community marriage agreements rely heavily on churches to raise the bar for wedlock. Their strategies often include premarital counseling for engaged couples. That's a vital step, but we're going much further: In Grand Rapids, we are erecting a large civic tent under which a variety of community leaders—not only clergy but also political, medical, business, and judicial figures—come together to strengthen marriage.

We've formed a steering committee comprised of college presidents, attorneys, business owners, members of the clergy, a local mayor, and a judge. Together, they have helped draft perhaps the most broadly supported community marriage policy in the nation. It is surely one of the most ambitious. The policy sets three goals to be achieved within 10 years: reduce the divorce rate by 25 percent, reduce by 25 percent the number of children growing up without the benefit of married parents in a stable home, and establish thorough preparation for marriage as a community norm.

The Leaders

Changing the community's culture is a daunting task. Our policy asks everyone to take responsibility for the state of marriage in our community. A key ingredient in its success to date is the leadership shown by our steering committee.

Its chairman is Bill Hardiman, the mayor of Kentwood, a major suburb of Grand Rapids. The mayor is a passionate advocate for the Greater Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy. Popular and charismatic, he knows how to disarm critics who believe the policy implicitly condemns divorcing couples or single-parent families. He grew up in a single-parent family of eight children and went through a divorce himself after a brief, early marriage. He and his second wife, Clova, have been together for almost 25 years.

Appearing on television and radio, speaking to the press, and addressing church services and civic gatherings on behalf of the policy, Hardiman has used his platform as a respected civic leader to attract broad, high-level support. This spring, Hardiman appointed three task forces, for physical and mental health, legal and judicial matters, and religious issues. Two additional task forces soon will be created for business and education. Their purpose is to mobilize each sector of the community to help strengthen marriage.

Joseph Scoville, a federal district judge, is a cochairman of the Legal/Judicial Task Force. He intends to challenge judges and lawyers to become more sensitive to family considerations in their application of the law.

Scoville sees two major obstacles to this goal. The first is the strong bias in the law toward individual rights. Within this framework, marriage is regarded simply as a lifestyle choice and divorce as a right to be exercised unilaterally and at will. The second obstacle is the economic self-interest of divorce lawyers. Scoville wants the legal community to form a basic consensus about requirements—or at least recommendations—for couples seeking to marry. Judges who conduct civil marriage ceremonies might agree, for example, to

A billboard ad campaign tells drivers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where to go when their marriages run into trouble.

Photo courtesy of Greater Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy

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How To Preserve Marriages

Civic and religious leaders in Grand Rapids, Michigan, have come together to design and promote the following community marriage policy:

For Clergy and Congregations:

- Encourage a courtship of at least one year.
- Promote chastity outside of marriage and faithful marital relationships.
- Expect a thorough premarital preparation process of at least four premarital counseling sessions (or the equivalent) utilizing religious instruction, a premarital inventory, and intensive education.
- Encourage enrichment opportunities designed to strengthen marriages and intervention services for stressed marriages.
- Train mature married couples to serve as mentors to those who are engaged, newlyweds, or experiencing marital difficulties.
- Cooperate with other congregations and organizations to share resources and to create a positive climate in which all marriages are helped to succeed.

For the Community:

- Examine, each within our profession or line of work, ways in which our current policies and practices may unwittingly undermine marriage formation and stability.
- Implement changes in our work and relationships that will more effectively support marriages and families.
- Volunteer our time, expertise, influence, and resources to support initiatives that promote marriage and stable families.

strongly urge couples to seek premarital counseling.

Jerry DeRuiter, the CEO of a large mental-health services provider for families, is a cochairman of the Health/Mental Health Task Force. "We see too many kids whose parents are using them to play the game of divorce for points," he says. "No five-year-old should have to ask a therapist, 'Who do I believe, Mommy or Daddy?'"

DeRuiter wants the health-care community—particularly those involved in social work, counseling, and therapy—to encourage failing couples to honor their commitments to each other and to their children. "The language of individual rights tramples on kids," he says. "It makes children commodities to be disposed of." He wants health-care providers to become more aware of the value of helping parents stay together, and he wants the community to devote more resources to early intervention for marriages under stress.

He is attracting significant support. Susan Heartwell, the executive director of a local agency that combats child abuse, is a highly regarded local expert on domestic violence and its victims. She initially declined to endorse the community marriage policy because an early draft was silent on the subject of abusive marriages. But she eventually signed on after helping draft language recognizing that abusive marriages need not be endured.

Empowering the Churches

Michael McManus, the author of *Marriage Savers* and the architect of the community marriage policy concept, points out that churches and synagogues are foundational to the policy's success. Because at least 75 percent of our community's weddings take place in churches, our clergy and our congregations have both a special responsibility and a special opportunity to revitalize marriage. Therefore the policy includes a broadly Judeo-Christian theological basis, along with specific steps for clergy and congregations.

For some the policy has been catalytic. One pastor reported that his large downtown church had until now a "minimalist" policy with regard to marriage and premarital preparation. But his congregation rewrote their expectations to conform with those of the community marriage policy. Another pastor reported that his meetings with couples to lay out his expectations for premarital preparation have been more effective now that these expectations have been endorsed in a community-wide policy.

We are also assisting the clergy with practical tools. Last winter, we hosted four day-long seminars for clergy and lay leaders on techniques and resources for premarital preparation. We called on local experts, pastors, and counselors who were already leading model programs in our community. The four sessions attracted 120 registrants.

We have also developed a premarital preparation class for couples, conducted in two four-hour blocks on successive Saturdays. These classes cover marital expectations, communication, conflict resolution, finances, and gender and sexuality issues, among other topics. The faculty are mental-health professionals and the content is endorsed by our Clergy Task Force. Held four times a year, these classes rotate among various churches and attract couples from various backgrounds. They are designed to supplement, not replace, the vital role of clergy in preparing couples for marriage.

Raising Awareness

We face a huge task in raising public awareness about the importance of marriage to our community. Grand Rapids and Kent County are already home to strong advocacy groups and coalitions concerned with at-risk children and families, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, school dropouts, and sexually transmitted diseases. Until the advent of the community marriage policy, however, there had been little public discussion on the causal link between social problems and the marital structure of the homes in which our children are raised.

We have set three goals: reduce divorce, reduce the number of children outside two-parent homes, and establish thorough premarriage preparation.

"In public discourse, marriage is the 'M' word," says Theodora Ooms of the Family Impact Seminar, in Washington, D.C. "Nobody talks about it." So we are using the new marriage policy as a way to begin a public dialogue.

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To inaugurate the policy, we hosted a luncheon in March 1997 for 300 community leaders and members of the clergy at a downtown hotel. Our guest speaker was Michael McManus. In June 1997, we took out two full-page advertisements in three local newspapers, the *Grand Rapids Press*, the *Grand Rapids Times* (an African-American newspaper), and *El Hispano*. The first ad included a copy of the full text of the policy; the second was a roster of 400 people who had endorsed the policy.

The Long Haul

Our headquarters is located at the Family Institute, a mental-health education and prevention program of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, the largest provider of behavioral-health care in western Michigan. We have also secured broad financial support. We received contributions from about a dozen local philanthropists in amounts ranging from $500 to $10,000 each. In May, we received word of a $20,000 grant from a local donor toward the $99,000 budget for the next phase of the project.

We have a decade of work ahead of us. Because the weakening of marriage has deep roots in our culture's focus on individualism, we do not expect a quick remedy. Most of our civic leaders have not yet elevated marriage to the top of their agenda. At this time, we've barely touched our minority communities and those who are most at risk financially.

But we are encouraged by early signs of progress. A local college has put together a committee of faculty and counseling center staff to find ways to better prepare their students for marriage. Churches are upgrading their premarital and marriage-support programs.

In March 1998, a local conference on marriage sponsored by the Pine Rest Family Institute attracted 300 mental-health professionals, members of the clergy, and others. William Doherty, the author of *Soul Searching: Why Psychotherapy Must Promote Moral Responsibility*, challenged us to examine our counseling ethics critically. He believes that many practitioners undermine marriage by being inattentive to the social obligations of their clients toward spouses and children.

Thanks to our policy, a growing number of our citizens and civic groups see that healthy marriages are fundamental to healthy communities.

A growing number of our city's citizens and civic groups are beginning to see that healthy marriages are fundamental to healthy communities. We know this approach can work: In at least 15 cities that have embraced community marriage policies, says McManus, the divorce rate has dropped significantly. In the words of the Reverend Ben Ingebretson, one of the original framers of our community marriage policy, "Our job is to cast the vision. Having done that, we claim partnership with every person and organization in our city who is working to strengthen marriage."

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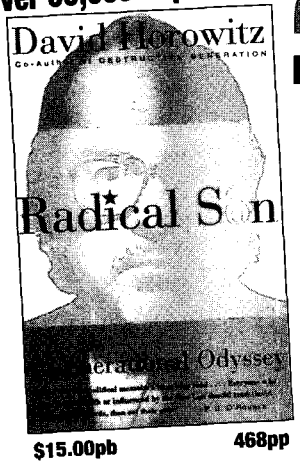

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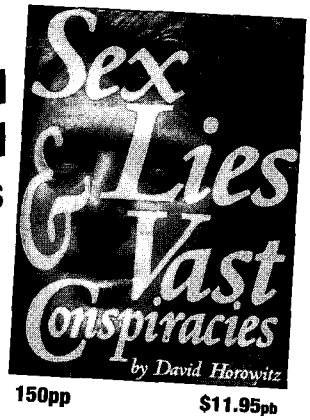

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Laboratories of Democracy

The Tax Revolt Turns 20

by Steven Hayward

Steven Hayward, a Bradley Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, *is the author of* Churchill on Leadership *(Prima Publishing).*

This June marks the 20th anniversary of California's Proposition 13, the property-tax-cut initiative that set off America's tax revolt. Within two years of its adoption, 43 states implemented some kind of property-tax limitation or relief, 15 states lowered their income-tax rates, and 10 states indexed their state income taxes for inflation. The widespread public backlash against high taxes that began in California contributed to Ronald Reagan's election to the White House in 1980 on a supply-side platform and pushed taxes to the top tier of national political issues.

As the prospect of significant tax cuts in Congress stalls, however, some observers think the tax revolt is a spent force. The media touts every local vote in favor of a bond measure or tax increase. Meanwhile, a liberal counterattack has been gaining momentum. Fans of bigger government like to point out that the tax burden on our economy is lower than that of European nations. (So is our unemployment rate, but no matter.) Even Proposition 13 has come under renewed attack as the cause of the "Mississippification" of California, as journalist Peter Schrag puts it in his new book, *Paradise Lost.*

The signal breakthroughs of the tax revolt have come mostly through citizen-led initiatives. No dynamic anti-tax activists, however, have stepped forward recently to succeed the likes of Howard Jarvis, who masterminded Prop 13, or Douglas Bruce, who wrote Colorado's tough Amendment 1 in 1992. Governors rarely propose the kind of deep, across-the-board slashing of tax rates we saw in the heyday of the tax revolt; entrenched interests will make life miserable for anyone who tries. That is why state tax cuts recently proposed or enacted give back only a fraction of current state surpluses and tend to be narrowly targeted at middle- and lower-income groups.

Has the tax revolt stalled? The backlash that began with Prop 13 has been institutionalized by supermajority limits.

Yet the tax revolt is far from spent. It's more like a dormant, smoldering volcano, capable of erupting on short notice. The tax revolt seems less prominent right now in part because it has become institutionalized in many states and localities through constitutional tax and spending limits. Also, having succeeded in limiting property taxes or general taxes in many states, anti-tax activism has moved on to unpopular *ad valorem* levies, such as the car tax. Finally, although there are many reasons for concluding that the tax revolt has been an incomplete success, there are signs that it could erupt again.

Institutionalizing the Tax Revolt

The most prevalent institutionalization of the tax revolt is the supermajority requirement for tax increases (usually a two-thirds or three-fourths majority) adopted by voters or legislatures in 14 states (see table, page 10). Ten of these 14 states adopted their supermajority requirements within the last eight years. Although we cannot fully evaluate the effects of recent supermajority requirements until we've experienced a complete business cycle, the early evidence from the states with such requirements suggests that they have a restraining influence on the growth of taxes and spending.

Separate studies by Dan Mitchell of The Heritage Foundation and Dean Stansel of the Cato Institute found that taxes and spending grew slower in states with supermajority requirements than in states that did not. Mitchell found that, between 1980 and 1992, tax revenues grew about 20 percent less in supermajority states than in other states, while spending grew 9 percent less. Economic growth in supermajority states was 8 percent higher than other states, and job growth was 5 percent higher.

Stansel's study was broader in scope, examining all tax and spending limitation features—not just supermajority requirements—during the five years preceding and following each state's adoption of fiscal limits. Stansel found that states that adopted tax and spending limits experienced spending growth 0.8 percent higher than the U.S. average before adopting limits, while spending growth was 2.9 percent lower than the average following the adoption of limits. Stansel's most significant finding, however, was that voter-designed tax and spending limits were more effective than those crafted by state legislatures.

Supermajority legislation is pending in 14 more states, including Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Minnesota. New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman and Michigan governor John Engler are the most recent statehouse executives to endorse a two-thirds supermajority. Americans for Tax Reform, a national anti-tax group, takes a different approach to institutionalizing the tax revolt. It is extending its "no tax" pledge—a promise by public officials to vote against any new taxes or tax increases—to the state level. As of June 1, ATR has obtained "no tax" pledge signatures from 1,017 state legislators and statewide elected officials.

Ax the Car Tax

By far the most prominent expression of the latent potency of the tax revolt is the instant energy generated by the car tax issue. Virginia Republican Jim Gilmore first brought the car tax to the fore in his successful guber-

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natorial campaign last fall. In early October, polls showed Gilmore in a dead heat with his Democratic opponent. After Gilmore unveiled his "no car tax" pledge, however, he rode a substantial lead to a 12-point win last November.

Virginia motorists pay an annual 4.5 percent tax on the value of their autos. Gilmore proposed to phase in an exemption of the first $20,000 in value on every car, which the Virginia legislature enacted after some initial handwringing. Thirty-one states have a car tax of some kind. Rates vary from locality to locality within states; the levy in some Rhode Island counties has reached 5.4 percent. "No car tax" boomlets have erupted in several states as a result of Gilmore's visible success. In Washington state, activists are collecting signatures to put a car-tax initiative on the November ballot. California governor Pete Wilson came out in late May for a 75 percent cut in California's car tax. Such a cut would be worth more than $2 billion, the largest tax cut (in nominal dollar terms) in California history—even larger than Proposition 13.

Other skirmishes are underway in various states. Arizona congressman Matt Salmon is spearheading a petition drive for a November initiative to abolish Arizona's state income tax by the year 2004. Rhode Island's Republican governor Lincoln Almond wants to phase in a modest, $175-a-year property tax cut over five years, but Democrats in the state legislature are blocking it.

Even tax-happy New York City suspended its 8.25 percent sales tax for one week last January. Retail sales soared between 40 and 100 percent at most stores in the Big Apple, prompting Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to call for a 50 percent cut in the sales tax for the next Christmas season. New York Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, meanwhile, has proposed abolishing the state's 4.25 percent share of New York's sales tax and giving New York City the option of abolishing its local sales tax on clothing.

Virginia governor James Gilmore's "no car tax" pledge proved that the tax revolt still has wheels.

Lessons Learned

There are lessons to be learned from the shortcomings of the tax revolt. Most important, although the tax revolt has slowed the growth of government spending in several states, it has not yet managed to roll back the size of state government. State spending has continued to climb faster than both population and personal income over the last decade (see chart, next page). Despite all of the froth about "reinventing government" at the state and local level in recent years, the tax revolt has not yet infused the public sector with the culture of the private sector, where gains in productivity drive down the cost of goods and services.

The chief reason for continued growth in spending is that state tax structures collect two-thirds of total revenue from personal-income, business, and sales taxes, which generate huge tax collections during economic booms and fall off when recessions hit. As large surpluses accumulate (the combined surplus of all 50 states may exceed $30 billion this year), state officials prefer to ratchet up the size of government rather than cut taxes or save the money in a "rainy day" reserve fund. When the business cycle turns down, states sock their citizens with tax hikes to cover the structural deficits they created during the good times. This was the story in California, where routine surpluses throughout the 1980s swiftly turned into a $14-billion deficit in 1991, requiring hikes in income *and* sales taxes. (Governor Pete Wilson managed to hold the line somewhat by making the income-tax hike temporary, but he has been unsuccessful in rolling back income taxes further as the state's economy recovered.)

The next step for the tax revolt, therefore, needs to be more effective *spending* limits, so that budget surpluses in good times don't inflate the size of government. As governor of California, Ronald Reagan proposed in 1973 to limit California's state spending to 7 percent of personal income (it is currently about 9 percent), but the tax revolt had not gained sufficient traction by then. A few states, however, have taken some steps in this direction. Since 1978, Michigan has had a constitutional cap on state revenue of 9.49 percent of personal income. Washington and Colorado voters embraced measures to fight the ratchet effect by tying future spending growth to inflation and population growth in 1993 and 1992, respectively, while Connecticut voters adopted a measure in 1993 tying spending growth to growth in personal income.

Another downside of some tax limitation measures, especially property-tax cuts such as Proposition 13, is that they have often contributed to a greater centralization of power at the state level. In California, for example, the state government assumed the burden of funding public schools after Prop 13. Since state funding came with strings and conditions, Prop 13 had the effect of enhancing the power of the education bureaucracy and eroding local control. "The passage of Proposition 13," the Urban Institute's Frank Levy wrote, "has caused almost the entire liberal

Illustration by Kathryn Vierra

Tax Superheroes

Fourteen states have helped institutionalize the tax revolt by requiring a "supermajority" vote to enact new taxes or tax increases.

State	Majority requirement
Arizona	2/3 of legislature
Arkansas	3/4 of legislature
California	2/3 of legislature
Colorado	2/3 of voters
Delaware	3/5 of legislature
Florida	2/3 of voters
Louisiana	2/3 of legislature
Mississippi	3/5 of legislature
Missouri	2/3 of voters
Nevada	2/3 of legislature
Oklahoma	3/4 of legislature
Oregon	3/5 of legislature
South Dakota	2/3 of legislature
Washington	2/3 of legislature

Source: Americans for Tax Reform

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agenda to be de facto adopted."

The flood of lawsuits (in 28 states at last count) to equalize education funding statewide will likely exacerbate this problem. In many states, the highest court has ruled that disparities between school districts in per-pupil funding based on local property taxes violates the state constitution. Many governors—especially Republicans—have flunked this challenge by moving to raise state income or sales taxes in place of the local property tax. (See "Low Profiles in Courage," *Policy Review*, March–April 1998.) In most cases, such as Ohio and Illinois, this "tax shift" would result in a net tax increase.

Michigan governor John Engler provides one example of how to finesse the issue successfully. After Engler campaigned for governor in 1990 on a pledge to cut the property tax, Democrats in the state legislature mischievously proposed to abolish the local property tax as a school funding source.

Engler called their bluff: He placed an initiative on the ballot that cut Michigan's flat personal-income-tax rate and replaced the local property tax with a smaller, statewide property levy; a 2-point boost in the state sales tax, to 6 percent; and a hike in the cigarette tax. Engler's Measure A garnered 69 percent of the vote in 1994, producing a net tax cut and allowing Engler to equalize public-school financing among school districts. (He mitigated the centralizing aspects of this fiscal shift with an array of education reforms aimed at curbing the clout of the teachers unions and the bureaucracy.)

The total tax burden in Michigan is about $500 million lower than it was before Engler took office in 1991, which the Mackinac Center's Michael Lafaive credits with helping Michigan move out of recession in the early 1990s, before the rest of the country.

Many conservatives prefer direct taxes over surreptitious consumption taxes whose impact on taxpayers is harder to see.

Michigan's fiscal reform, Mackinac's Lawrence Reed believes, is a model other states should consider emulating.

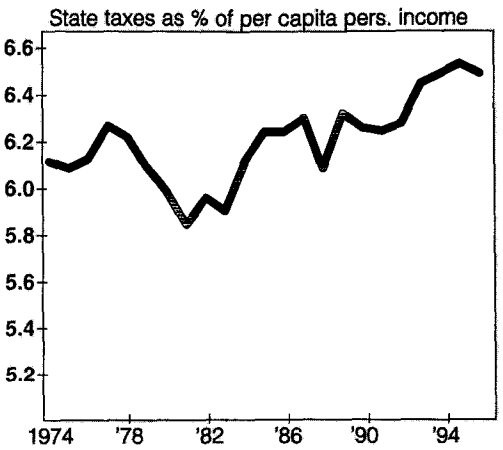
There are hazards to this tax-shift strategy, however, as the experience of Texas governor George Bush shows. When Bush took office in 1995, Texas taxpayers were fed up with high property taxes. He proposed a wholesale tax shift that would have cut the property tax while raising a number of business taxes and excise taxes. The shift was designed to be revenue-neutral, but conservatives opposed the plan because they feared it would introduce a tax system that was inherently biased toward higher taxes in the future. Some conservatives would rather rely on direct taxes like the property tax, which are politically difficult to raise, than excise taxes and sales taxes, which officials may be tempted to raise perpetually because they are levied incrementally and in small amounts.

Moreover, tax shifts for the public schools are a dry run for a much more ambitious tax-shift agenda by the Left: substituting consumption taxes for income taxes in the name of the environment and public health. Think of it as the ultimate "sin" tax. Environmentalists are beginning to argue for wholesale tax reform to alleviate global warming by taxing "bads" (such as carbon dioxide emissions and gasoline use) in place of existing taxes on income and capital gains. Conservative tax reformers who are currently exploring the idea of a shift from the income tax to a simple broad-based sales tax should be careful not to get hijacked by the liberals' version of consumption taxes.

Even if such a tax shift were revenue-neutral, there are grave problems with using tax policy to affect the quantities of resources used and byproducts produced in the marketplace. We could end up replacing the existing complex income tax code with an equally complex consumption tax code with bureaucrats deciding what was "good" and "bad" for us and fixing prices accordingly. Once the bureaucratic presumption in favor of such taxes was in place, it would be very hard to mount an effective revolt against taxes that are regarded as the primary bulwark against the coming apocalypse.

Is There Relief in Sight?

Although the state tax burden (measured as a share of per capita personal income) dipped slightly in the early years of the tax revolt, state governments have not been broken of their reliance on ever-higher levies. But as the table on the right shows, some states are better than others.



Source: Tax Foundation, U.S. Statistical Abstract

	State and local taxes as % of pers. income
High-tax states	
1. Hawaii	14.2
2. New York	13.6
3. Wisconsin	13.5
4. Minnesota	13.1
5. Connecticut	12.9
Low-tax states	
1. Alaska	6.1
2. New Hampshire	6.5
3. Wyoming	7.9
4. Tennessee	8.6
5. Alabama	9.5
U.S. Average	11.1

The Next Generation

If the tax revolt has its weaknesses, it also has assets that must be assayed on the positive side of the ledger. Although some of the early tax-limitation measures, as noted above, resulted in increased centralization of government, several "second generation" tax measures have actually contributed to the cause of devolution.

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Polls show that taxpayer confidence in government spending is inversely related to the proximity of the level of government doing the spending. According to a recent survey in *American Demographics*, only 42 percent of Americans think they get their money's worth from federal taxes, 56 percent think that of state taxes, and more than 60 percent think that of local taxes.

Michigan governor John Engler equalized school funding without usurping local schools' authority.

Illustration by Kathryn Vierra

Hence, tax limitations such as Colorado's Amendment 1, which requires voter approval for all taxes at all levels, exploit the resistance to taxes at higher levels of government and effectively pushes government functions down to the local level. In Colorado, voters approve more than 90 percent of local revenue measures before them. Meanwhile, there has been no effort made to lift state tax limits. California has had a similar experience with local tax measures in the aftermath of Proposition 218, which closed some Prop 13 loopholes and tightened up voting requirements for local taxes.

What are the prospects for the tax revolt? Three themes come to mind. First, historical evidence suggests that public intolerance of federal taxes erupts whenever federal tax receipts begin to exceed 20 percent of GDP, as they do currently. Though state tax burdens vary widely between, for example, high-tax Connecticut and low-tax Florida, the same phenomena can be observed at the state level. In the early 1970s, California voters rejected several tax-limitation measures prior to Prop 13 until inflationary "bracket creep" pushed the total state and local tax burden from 11.5 percent of personal income to nearly 16 percent in just four years. Conditions are ripe for another taxpayer eruption.

Second, while the stalemate over revenue mainstays such as income and sales taxes may continue, the battle is shifting to new areas, such as the Internet. State revenue officials are drooling to get a piece of Internet commerce, whose annual value is expected to top $200 billion by the year 2000. The states were dramatically rebuffed in their attempt last year to impose sales taxes on interstate mail-order sales, a favorite means of tax avoidance among consumers these days. The Internet, however, allows tax hikers to hide new levies in the price of electronic transactions where the consumer won't notice them. States with strong high-tech industries (including California, Massachusetts, and Washington) have passed laws specifically exempting Internet businesses from taxes, and a bill is pending in Congress that would impose an indefinite moratorium on state taxation of the Internet.

Internet taxation poses questions about the nature of goods and services in the Information Age that demonstrate the obsolescence of the current tax system. But attempts to "modernize" the tax code to tap the information economy are going to collide with the quality that makes the information revolution such a powerful and productive force: individual independence. Hence it will be very hard to impose many new taxes on the information economy.

The third tax revolt theme that is gradually surfacing was explained recently in the pages of the *New Republic*. The "seeds of what may be America's next tax revolt" are the nation's 25 million self-employed and independent contractors. The double taxation for Social Security, the disadvantageous tax treatment for health insurance, and the onerous tax compliance and filing requirements all give self-employed people a lot to complain about.

"You can almost hear the rumble of a tax rebellion in the making," said the *New Republic*. "The politician who finds a way to address the concerns of these new tax protesters may find himself the darling of a constituency whose allegiance is as yet unclaimed and whose numbers are large enough to sway elections." The author of this cogent critique was Daniel Pink, a former chief speechwriter for Vice President Al

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State of the States

Social Security Opt-Out Update

Colorado has followed **Oregon**'s lead in asking Congress to allow the state to opt out of the Social Security system and set up an alternative for its citizens (see "Oregon's Revolt Against Social Security," *Policy Review*, Jan.–Feb. 1998). Legislation calling on Congress to create a state waiver process passed the lower house of the state legislature in March and the state senate in early May. A similar resolution has also passed committees in both houses of the **Arizona** legislature. Social Security waiver legislation has also been introduced in **Georgia**, **Indiana**, **New Hampshire**, **South Carolina**, **Utah**, and **Washington**.

Take Me Out to the Cleaners

Phoenix and St. Petersburg joined the ranks of cities with major league baseball teams this spring, but it was their taxpayers who faced the first beanballs. Even though Phoenix residents voted down a $100-million stadium bond measure in 1989, state and county officials went ahead and committed taxpayers to forking over $253 million for a new stadium through a sales tax increase that never went before voters. St. Petersburg officials hit taxpayers with a $170-million high, hard one for its new stadium. After the initial excitement of the new teams wears off, taxpayers may want to send their elected officials a few brushback pitches of their own. **North Carolina** voters, meanwhile, aren't fooled by local officials' big league pitch: In early May, they voted against a sales-tax hike designed to lure the Minnesota Twins to the Tar Heel state.

Spare the Rod, Spoil the Coasts

The American Academy of Pediatrics made news in April with a report that criticized corporal punishment for children and recommended softer alternatives such as "time out." The academy surveyed parents nationwide about their attitudes toward spanking and found that 70 percent support corporal punishment. But these parents are located mostly in the heartland, while parents on the coasts (especially in **California**, the Beltway, and the Northeast) eschew corporal punishment. The states with the strongest support for spanking are **South Dakota**, **Arkansas**, **Louisiana**, **Mississippi**, **Tennessee**, and **South Carolina**; the most lenient parents are in **Connecticut**.

Defunding the Left

In a campus version of "paycheck protection," students at the University of Oregon voted recently to deny automatic student funding to the Oregon Student's Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG), a Nader-inspired "consumer activist" group known for creating leftist political mischief. OSPIRG had been assessing students more than $8 apiece in fees each year, or nearly $150,000 total, which it used for "research and advocacy." Now OSPIRG may have to close down its U. of O. chapter. A few years ago, *Mother Jones* magazine lauded the university as one of the country's most liberal activist campuses.

Kidcare Breakthrough

When Congress passed the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP, better known as "Kidcare") last year to provide health-care coverage for uninsured children, congressional liberals intended the states to use the block-grant money—as much as $48 billion over the next decade—to cover children through their Medicaid programs. But **North Carolina** has broken from the pack and created a refundable tax credit of up to $300 per child for private insurance, offering parents the option of using a private insurance provider instead of the state-run program.

The size of the credit shrinks as family income rises, but, as John Hood of the **John Locke Foundation** notes, "The precedent has now been set: Families who buy dependent health care with after-tax dollars will begin to get the same kinds of tax breaks that families with employer-provided benefits already receive." (The Locke Foundation sponsored the original plan on which the tax credit is based.)

Education Miscellany

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that the Academy of the Pacific Rim, a Boston charter school, has begun offering a "learning guarantee" to parents of children who enroll in the school. The school will permit any of its students who do not pass their 10th-grade state assessment test to pick another public or private school, and will transfer directly to that school the $7,400 in per-pupil state funding that the Academy receives. "Guarantees exist for mufflers, airline services, and dozens of services in America," Stacey Boyd, the director of the school, told the *Journal*. "Yet no service, save perhaps health care, matters as much to a person's livelihood than education."

Four states—**North Carolina**, **Missouri**, **Mississippi**, and **Maryland**—have announced that they plan to begin using a standardized test to license public-school principals. The test, developed by the Educational Testing Service and the Council for the Chief State School Officers, will test "comprehensive skills" and "real world decisions," based on situations a principal is likely to face. Meanwhile, **Texas** is moving to sanction any of its 87 state teacher colleges whenever 30 percent or more of its graduates fail teacher licensing examinations. Teacher colleges that cannot raise their graduates' pass rates within two years will be shut down. **Florida**, **New York**, and **Pennsylvania** are considering similar accountability standards for their teacher training colleges.

The teachers union in **California** has been using its clout in the state legislature to block any expansion of charter schools there. But when deep-pocket, high-tech interests in Silicon Valley collected enough signatures to put a charter-school-expansion initiative on the November ballot, the unions relented. Governor Pete Wilson has signed a bill that will lift the current cap of 200 charter schools and remove some of the procedural barriers to forming new ones. The bill will allow up to 100 new charter schools per year.

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Killing Them Softly

The Clinton administration says giving clean needles to drug users will slow the spread of AIDS and save lives. But former addicts—and the specialists who treat them—say their greatest threats come from the soul-destroying culture of addiction

By Joe Loconte

In a midrise office building on Manhattan's West 37th Street, about two blocks south of the Port Authority bus terminal, sits the Positive Health Project, one of 11 needle-exchange outlets in New York City. This particular neighborhood, dotted by X-rated video stores, peep shows, and a grimy hot dog stand, could probably tolerate some positive health. But it's not clear that's what the program's patrons are getting.

The clients are intravenous (IV) drug users. They swap their used needles for clean ones and, it is hoped, avoid the AIDS virus, at least until their next visit. There's no charge, no hassles, no meddlesome questions. That's just the way Walter, a veteran heroin user, likes it.

"Just put me on an island and don't mess with me," he says, lighting up a cigarette.

A tall, thinnish man, Walter seems weary for his 40-some years. Like many of the estimated 250,000 IV drug users in this city, he has spent years shooting up and has bounced in and out of detoxification programs. "Don't get the idea in your mind you're going to control it," he says. "I thought I could control it. But dope's a different thing. You just want it." Can he imagine his life without drugs? "I'm past that," he says, his face tightening. "The only good thing I do is getting high."

Photo by Charles Tack

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Heroin First, Then Breathing

Supporters of needle-exchange programs (NEPs), from AIDS activists to Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, seem to have reached the same verdict on Walter's life. They take his drug addiction as a given, but want to keep him free of HIV by making sure he isn't borrowing dirty syringes. Says Shalala, "This is another life-saving intervention." That message is gaining currency, thanks in part to at least 112 programs in 29 states, distributing millions of syringes each year.

Critics say free needles just make it easier for addicts to go about their business: abusing drugs. Ronn Constable, a Brooklynite who used heroin and cocaine for nearly 20 years, says he would have welcomed the needle-exchange program—for saving him money. "An addict doesn't want to spend a dollar on anything else but his drugs," he says.

Do needle exchanges, then, save lives or fuel addiction?

The issue flared up earlier this year when Shalala indicated the Clinton administration would lift the ban on federal funding. Barry McCaffrey, the national drug policy chief, denounced the move, saying it would sanction drug use. Fearing a political debacle, the White House upheld the federal ban but continues to trumpet the effectiveness of NEPs. Meanwhile, Representative Gerald Solomon and Senator Paul Coverdell are pushing legislation in Congress to extend the prohibition indefinitely.

There is more than politics at work here. The debate reveals a deepening philosophical rift between the medical and moral approaches to coping with social ills.

Joined by much of the scientific community, the Clinton administration has tacitly embraced a profoundly misguided notion: that we must not confront drug abusers on moral or religious grounds. Instead, we should use medical interventions to minimize the harm their behavior invites. Directors of needle-exchange outlets pride themselves on running "nonjudgmental" programs. While insisting they do not encourage illegal drug use, suppliers distribute "safe crack kits" explaining the best ways to inject crack cocaine. Willie Easterlins, an outreach worker at a needle-stocked van in Brooklyn, sums up the philosophy this way: "I have to give you a needle. I can't judge," he says. "That's the first thing they teach us."

This approach, however well intentioned, ignores the soul-controlling darkness of addiction and the moral freefall that sustains it. "When addicts talk about enslavement, they're not exaggerating," says Terry Horton, the medical director of Phoenix House, one of the nation's largest residential treatment centers. "It is their first and foremost priority. Heroin first, then breathing, then food."

It is true that needle-sharing among IV drug users is a major source of HIV transmission, and that the incidence of HIV is rising most rapidly among this group—a population of more than a million people. Last year, about 30 percent of all new HIV infections were linked to IV drug use. The Clinton administration is correct to call this a major public-health risk.

Nevertheless, NEP advocates seem steeped in denial about the behavioral roots of the crisis, conduct left unchallenged by easy access to clean syringes. Most IV drug users, in fact, die not from HIV-tainted needles but from other health problems, overdoses, or homicide. By evading issues of personal responsibility, the White House and its NEP allies are neglecting the most effective help for drug abusers: enrollment in tough-minded treatment programs enforced by drug courts. Moreover, in the name of "saving lives," they seem prepared to surrender countless addicts to life on the margins—an existence of scheming, scamming, disease, and premature death.

Curious Science

Over the last decade, NEPs have secured funding from local departments of public health to establish outlets in 71 cities. But that may be as far as their political argument will take them: Federal law prohibits federal money from flowing to the programs until it can be proved they prevent AIDS without encouraging drug use.

It's no surprise, then, that advocates are trying to enlist science as an ally. They claim that numerous studies of NEPs prove they are effective. Says Sandra Thurman, the director of the Office of National AIDS Policy, "There is very little doubt that these programs reduce HIV transmission." In arguing for federal funding, a White House panel on AIDS recently cited "clear scientific evidence of the efficacy of such programs."

The Clinton administration has tacitly embraced a profoundly misguided notion: that we must not confront drug abusers on moral or religious grounds.

The studies, though suggestive, prove no such thing. Activists tout the results of a New Haven study, published in the *American Journal of Medicine*, saying the program reduces HIV among participants by a third. Not exactly. Researchers tested needles from anonymous users—not the addicts themselves—to see if they contained HIV. They never measured "seroconversion rates," the portion of participants who became HIV positive during the study. Even Peter Lurie, a University of Michigan researcher and avid NEP advocate, admits that "the validity of testing of syringes is limited." A likely explanation for the decreased pres-

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ence of HIV in syringes, according to scientists, is sampling error.

Another significant report was published in 1993 by the University of California and funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. A panel reviewed 21 studies on the impact of NEPs on HIV infection rates. But the best the authors could say for the programs was that none showed a higher prevalence of HIV among program clients.

Even those results don't mean much. Panel members rated the scientific quality of the studies on a five-point scale: one meant "not valid," three "acceptable," and five "excellent." Only two of the studies earned ratings of three or higher. Of those, neither showed a reduction in HIV levels. No wonder the authors concluded that the data simply do not, and for methodological reasons probably cannot, provide clear evidence that needle exchanges decrease HIV infection rates.

The Missing Link

The most extensive review of needle-exchange studies was commissioned in 1993 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which directed the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to oversee the project. Their report, "Preventing HIV Transmission: The Role of Sterile Needles and Bleach," was issued in 1995 and set off a political firestorm.

"Well-implemented needle-exchange programs can be effective in preventing the spread of HIV and do not increase the use of illegal drugs," a 15-member panel concluded. It recommended lifting the ban on federal funding for NEPs, along with laws against possession of injection paraphernalia. The NAS report has emerged as the bible for true believers of needle exchange.

It is not likely to stand the test of time. A truly scientific trial testing the ability of NEPs to reduce needle-sharing and HIV transmission would set up two similar, randomly selected populations of drug users. One group would be given access to free needles, the other would not. Researchers would follow them for at least a year, taking periodic blood tests.

Recent studies from Montreal and Vancouver cast doubt on the ability of NEPs to reduce HIV infection.

None of the studies reviewed by NAS researchers, however, were designed in this way. Their methodological problems are legion: Sample sizes are often too small to be statistically meaningful. Participants are self-selected, so that the more health-conscious could be skewing the results. As many as 60 percent of study participants drop out. And researchers rely on self-reporting, a notoriously untrustworthy tool.

"Nobody has done the basic science yet," says David Murray, the research director of the Statistical Assessment Service, a watchdog group in Washington, D.C. "If this were the FDA applying the standard for a new drug, they would [block] it right there."

The NAS panel admitted its conclusions were not based on reviews of well-designed trials. Such studies, the authors agreed, *simply do not exist.* Not to worry, they said: "The limitations of individual studies do not necessarily preclude us from being able to reach scientifically valid conclusions." When all of the studies are considered together, they argued, the results are compelling.

"That's like tossing a bunch of broken Christmas ornaments in a box and claiming you have something nice and new and usable," Murray says. "What you have is a lot of broken ornaments." Two of the three physicians on the NAS panel, Lawrence Brown and Herbert Kleber, agree. They deny their report established anything like a scientific link between lower HIV rates and needle exchanges. "The existing data is flawed," says Kleber, executive vice president for medical research at Columbia University. "NEPs may, in theory, be effective, but the data doesn't prove that they are."

Some needle-exchange advocates acknowledge the dearth of hard science. Don Des Jarlais, a researcher at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center, writes in a 1996 report that "there has been no direct evidence that participation is associated with a lower risk" of HIV infection. Lurie, writing in the *American Journal of Epidemiology,* says that "no one study, on its own, should be used to declare the programs effective." Nevertheless, supporters insist, the "pattern of evidence" is sufficient to march ahead with the programs.

Mixed Results

That argument might make sense if all the best studies created a happy, coherent picture. They don't. In fact, more-recent and better-controlled studies cast serious doubt on the ability of NEPs to reduce HIV infection.

In 1996, Vancouver researchers followed 1,006 intravenous cocaine and heroin users who visited needle exchanges, conducting periodic blood tests and interviews. The results, published in the British research journal *AIDS,* were not encouraging: About 40 percent of the test group reported borrowing a used needle in the preceding six months. Worse, after only eight months, 18.6 percent of those initially HIV negative became infected with the virus.

Dr. Steffanie Strathdee, of the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, was the report's lead researcher. She found it "particularly disturbing" that needle-sharing among program

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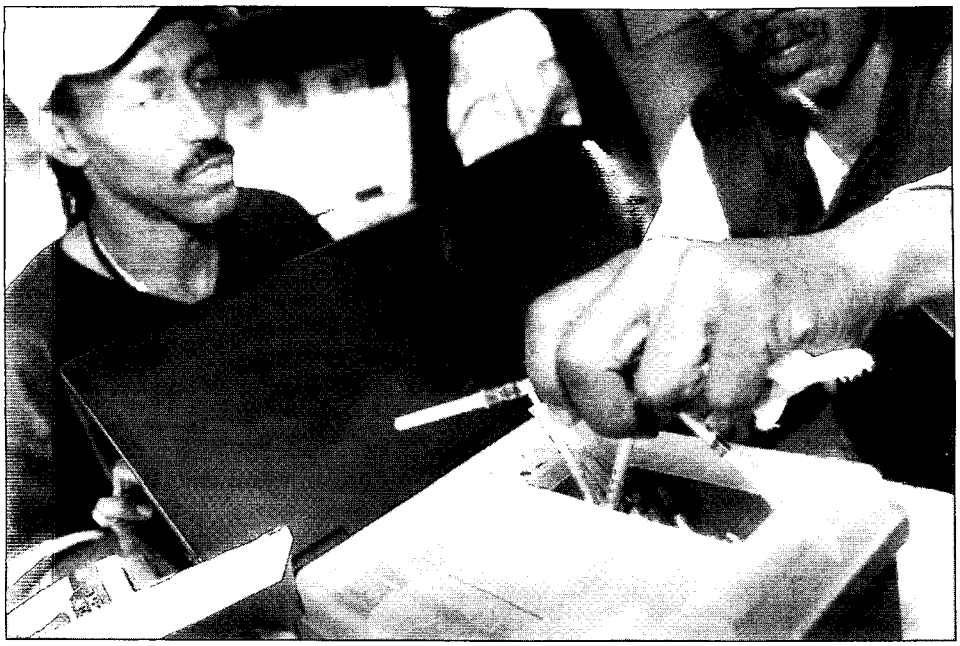

In a mobile needle-exchange unit parked at a Washington, D.C., street corner, a program staffer (left) looks on as a client disposes of used syringes.

participants, despite access to clean syringes, is common. Though an NEP advocate, Strathdee concedes that the high HIV rates are "alarming." Shepherd Smith, founder of Americans for a Sound AIDS/HIV Policy, says that compared to similar drug-using populations in the United States, the Vancouver results are "disastrous."

Though it boasts the largest needle-exchange program in North America, Vancouver is straining under an AIDS epidemic. When its NEP began in 1988, HIV prevalence among IV drug users was less than 2 percent. Today it's about 23 percent, despite a citywide program that dispenses 2.5 million needles a year.

A 1997 Montreal study is even more troubling. It showed that addicts who used needle exchanges were more than twice as likely to become infected with HIV as those who didn't. Published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, the report found that 33 percent of NEP users and 13 percent of nonusers became infected during the study period. Moreover, about three out of four program clients continued to share needles, roughly the same rate as nonparticipants.

The results are hard to dismiss. The report, though it did not rely on truly random selection, is the most sophisticated attempt so far to overcome the weaknesses of previous NEP studies. Researchers worked with a statistically significant sample (about 1,500), established test groups with better controls and lower dropout rates, and took greater care to account for "confounding variables." They followed each participant for an average of 21 months, taking blood samples every six months.

Blood samples don't lie. Attending an NEP was "a strong predictor" of the risk of contracting HIV, according to Julie Bruneau of the University of Montreal, the lead researcher. Bruneau's team then issued a warning: "We believe caution is warranted before accepting NEPs as uniformly beneficial in any setting."

The findings have sent supporters into a frenzy, with many fretting about their impact on public funding. "While it was important that the study be published," Peter Lurie complained to one magazine, "whether that information outweighs the political costs is another matter." In a bizarre *New York Times* oped, Bruneau recently disavowed some of her own conclusions. She said the results could be explained by higher-risk behavior engaged in by program users, a claim anticipated and rejected by her own report.

And that objection lands NEP supporters on the horns of a dilemma: Any control weaknesses in the Canadian reports are also present in the pro-exchange studies. "You can't have it both ways," Kleber says. "You can't explain away Montreal and Vancouver without applying the same scientific measures to the studies you feel are on your side."

Defending an expansion of the programs, AIDS policy czar Thurman says, "We need to let science drive the issue of needle exchange." The best that can be said for the evidence so far is that it doesn't tell us much. Without better-controlled studies, science cannot be hauled out as a witness for either side of the debate.

Death-Defying Logic

Critics of needle exchanges are forced to admit there's a certain logic to the concept, at least in theory: Give enough clean needles to an IV drug user and he won't bum contaminated "spikes" when he wants a fix.

But ex-addicts themselves, and the medical specialists who treat them, say it isn't that simple. "People think that everybody in shooting galleries worries about AIDS or syphilis or crack-addicted babies. That's the least of people's worries," says Jean Scott, the director of adult programs at Phoenix House in Manhattan. "While they're using, all they can think about is continuing to use and where they're going to get their next high."

Indeed, the NEP crowd mistakenly assumes that most addicts worry about getting AIDS. Most

Photo by Bill Crandall

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probably don't: The psychology and physiology of addiction usually do not allow them the luxury. "Once they start pumping their system with drugs, judgment disappears. Memory disappears. Nutrition disappears. The ability to evaluate their life needs disappears," says Eric Voth, the chairman of the International Drug Strategy Institute and one of the nation's leading addiction specialists. "What makes anybody think they'll make clean needles a priority?"

Ronn Constable, now a program director at Teen Challenge International in New York, says his addiction consumed him 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Addicts call it "chasing the bag": shooting up, feeling the high, and planning the next hit before withdrawal. "For severe addicts, that's all they do," Constable says. "Their whole life is just scheming to get their next dollar to get their next bundle of dope."

Ernesto Margaro fed his heroin habit for seven years, at times going through 40 bags—or $400—a day. He recalls walking up to a notorious drug den in the Bedford-Stuyvestant section of Brooklyn with a few of his friends. A man stumbled out onto the sidewalk and collapsed. They figured he was dying.

Margaro opened a fire hydrant on him. "When he finally came to, the first thing we asked him was where he got that dope from," he says. "We needed to know, because if it made him feel like that, we were going to take just a little bit less than he did."

This is typical of the hard-core user: The newest, most potent batch of heroin on the streets, the one causing the most deaths, is in greatest demand. "They run around trying to find out who the dead person copped from," says Scott, a drug-treatment specialist with 30 years' experience. "The more deaths you have, the more popular the heroin is. That's the mentality of the addict."

Needle Entrepreneurs

Some younger addicts may at first be fearful of the AIDS virus, though that concern probably melts away as they continue to shoot up. But the hard-core abusers live in a state of deep denial. "I had them dying next to me," Constable says. "One of my closest buddies withered away. I never thought about it."

Needle-exchange programs are doing brisk business all over the country: San Diego, Seattle, Denver, Baltimore, Boston, and beyond. San Francisco alone hands out 2.2 million needles a year. If most addicts really aren't worried about HIV, then why do they come?

In most states, it is difficult to buy drug paraphernalia without a prescription. That makes it hard, some claim, to find syringes. But drug users can get them easily enough on the streets. The main reason they go to NEPs, it seems, is that the outlets are a free source of needles, cookers, cotton, and bleach. They're also convenient. They are run from storefronts or out of vans, and they operate several days a week at regular hours.

And they are hassle-free. Users are issued ID cards that entitle them to carry drug paraphernalia wherever they go. Police are asked to keep their distance lest they scare off clients.

Most programs require that users swap their old needles for new equipment, but people aren't denied if they "forget" to bring in the goods. And most are not rigid one-for-one exchanges. Jose Castellar works an NEP van at the corner of South Fifth Street and Marcy Avenue in Brooklyn. On a recent Thursday afternoon, a man walked up and mechanically dropped off 18 syringes in a lunch sack. Castellar recognized him as a regular, and gave him back 28—standard procedure. "It's sort of like an incentive," he explains.

It's the "incentive" part of the program that many critics find so objectionable. An apparently common strategy of NEP clients is to keep a handful of needles for themselves and sell the rest. Says Margaro, "They give you five needles. That's $2 a needle, that's $10. That's your next fix. That's all you're worried about."

Says a former addict, "They give you five needles. That's $2 a needle, that's $10. That's your next fix."

It may also explain why many addicts who know they are HIV positive—older users such as Walter—still visit NEPs. Nobody knows how many there are, because no exchanges require blood tests. In New York, health officials say that perhaps half of the older IV addicts on the streets are infected.

Defenders admit the system is probably being abused. "An addict is an addict. He's going to do what he needs to maintain his habit," says Easterlins, who works a van for ADAPT, one of New York City's largest needle-exchange programs. Naomi Fatt, ADAPT's executive director, is a little more coy. "We don't knowingly participate" in the black market for drug paraphernalia, she says. And if NEP clients are simply selling their syringes to other drug users? "We don't personally care how they get their sterile needles. If that's the only way they can save their lives is to get these needles on the streets, is that really so awful?"

Name Your Poison

In the debate over federal funding for NEPs, herein lies their siren song: Clean needles save lives. But there just isn't much evidence, scientific or otherwise, that free drug paraphernalia is protecting users.

The reason is drug addiction. Addicts attend-

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ing NEPs continue to swap needles and engage in risky sexual behavior. All the studies that claim otherwise are based on self-reporting, an unreliable gauge.

By not talking much about drug abuse, NEP activists effectively sidestep the desperation created by addiction. When drug users run out of money for their habit, for example, they often turn to prostitution—no matter how many clean needles are in the cupboard. And the most common way of contracting HIV is, of course, sexual intercourse. "Sex is a currency in the drug world," says Horton of Phoenix House. "It is a major mode of HIV infection. And you don't address that with needle exchange."

At least a third of the women in treatment at the Brooklyn Teen Challenge had been lured into prostitution. About 15 percent of the female clients in Manhattan's Phoenix House contracted HIV by exchanging sex for drugs. In trying to explain the high HIV rates in Vancouver, researchers admitted "it may be that sexual transmission plays an important role."

Kleber, a psychiatrist and a leading addiction specialist, has been treating drug abusers for 30 years. He says NEPs, even those that offer education and health services, aren't likely to become beacons of behavior modification. "Addiction erodes your ability to change your behavior," he says. "And NEPs have no track record of changing risky sexual behavior."

Or discouraging other reckless choices, for that matter. James Curtis, the director of addiction services at the Harlem Hospital Center, says addicts are not careful about cleanliness and personal hygiene, so they often develop serious infections, such as septicemia, around injection areas. "It is false, misleading, and unethical," he says, "to give addicts the idea that they can be intravenous drug abusers without suffering serious self-injury."

A recent University of Pennsylvania study followed 415 IV drug users in Philadelphia over four years. Twenty-eight died during the study. Only five died from causes associated with HIV. Most died for other reasons: overdoses, homicide, heart disease, kidney failure, liver disease, and suicide. Writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, medical professors George Woody and David Metzger said that compared to the risk of HIV infection, the threat of death to drug abusers from other causes is "more imminent."

That proved tragically correct for John Watters and Brian Weil, two prominent founders of needle exchanges who died of apparent heroin overdoses.

The "Safe" Way To Shoot Up

Needle-exchange programs say they do not encourage drug use, but their literature reads more like a recipe for crack than a warning against the perils of IV drug use. Here is the text from a typical example, a brochure called "Shoot Smart Shoot Safe: Tips for safer crack injection" from a Bridgeport, Connecticut, needle-exchange program:

Get your stuff ready:
1) Have a cooker, water, syringe, citric or ascorbic acid, cotton, and alcohol wipes ready.
2) Put crack and citric or ascorbic acid, (about a pinch to a slab), in cooker. Add plenty of water (about 30-40 I.U.). Smash and mix well.
3) Add cotton and draw up into syringe.

Get a vein ready:
1) Tie off, find a good vein, and clean with an alcohol wipe.
2) Inject; make sure you are in a vein, register, look for blood backflow in syringe.
3) Slowly push plunger in for injection. This helps to avoid vein trauma and collapse.
4) Withdraw needle. Apply pressure for about a minute. Use clean gauze, tissue, cloth, or whatever you have handy.

Take care of yourself:
1) Drink plenty of fluids. Juice, water, Gatorade, whatever you can.
2) EAT—nutrition is important.
3) Take a vitamin. Extra vitamin C is a plus.
4) Take care of your veins. Rotate injection sites, use an antibiotic ointment on your injection sites.

Remember!!!
1) Never share a syringe or cooker.
2) Always use a new syringe with every injection.
3) Rotate veins. Use different veins often.
4) Always clean injection area with an alcohol wipe before injecting.
5) Use only citric or ascorbic acid to dissolve crack. Avoid vinegar or lemon juice; these can lead to serious infections.

If Speedballing:
1) Prepare your dope as normal.
2) Add crack, citric acid and follow steps in #2.

Indeed, deaths from drug dependence in cities with active needle programs have been on an upward trajectory for years. In New York City hospitals, the number has jumped from 413 in 1990 to 909 in 1996.

Good and Ready?

Keeping drug users free of AIDS is a noble—but narrow—goal. Surely the best hope of keeping them alive is to get them off drugs and into treatment. Research from the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) shows that untreated opiate addicts die at a rate seven to eight times higher than similar patients in methadone-based treatment programs.

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Needle suppliers claim they introduce addicts to rehab services, and Shalala wants local officials to include treatment referral in any new needle-exchange programs. But program staffers are not instructed to confront addicts about their drug habit. The assumption: Unless drug abusers are ready to quit on their own, it won't work.

This explains why NEP advocates smoothly assert they support drug treatment, yet gladly supply users with all the drug-injection equipment they need. "The idea that they will choose on their own when they're ready is nonsense," says Voth, who says he's treated perhaps 5,000 abusers of cocaine, heroin, and crack. "Judgment is one of the things that disappears with addiction. The worst addicts are the ones least likely to stumble into sobriety and treatment."

Supporters of needle exchanges refuse to challenge the self-absorption that nourishes drug addiction.

According to health officials, most addicts do not seek treatment voluntarily, but enter through the criminal-justice system. Even those who volunteer do so because of intense pressure from spouses or employers or raw physical pain from deteriorating health. In other words, they begin to confront some of the unpleasant consequences of their drug habit.

"The only way a drug addict is going to consider stopping is by experiencing pain," says Robert Dupont, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical School. "Pain is what helps to break their delusion," says David Batty, the director of Teen Challenge in Brooklyn. "The faster they realize they're on a dead-end street, the faster they see the need to change."

Justice for Junkies

Better law enforcement, linked to drug courts and alternative sentencing for offenders, could be the best way to help them see the road signs up ahead. "It is common for an addict to say that jail saved his life," says Dr. Janet Lapey, the president of Drug Watch International. "Not until the drugs are out of his system does he usually think clearly enough to see the harm drugs are causing."

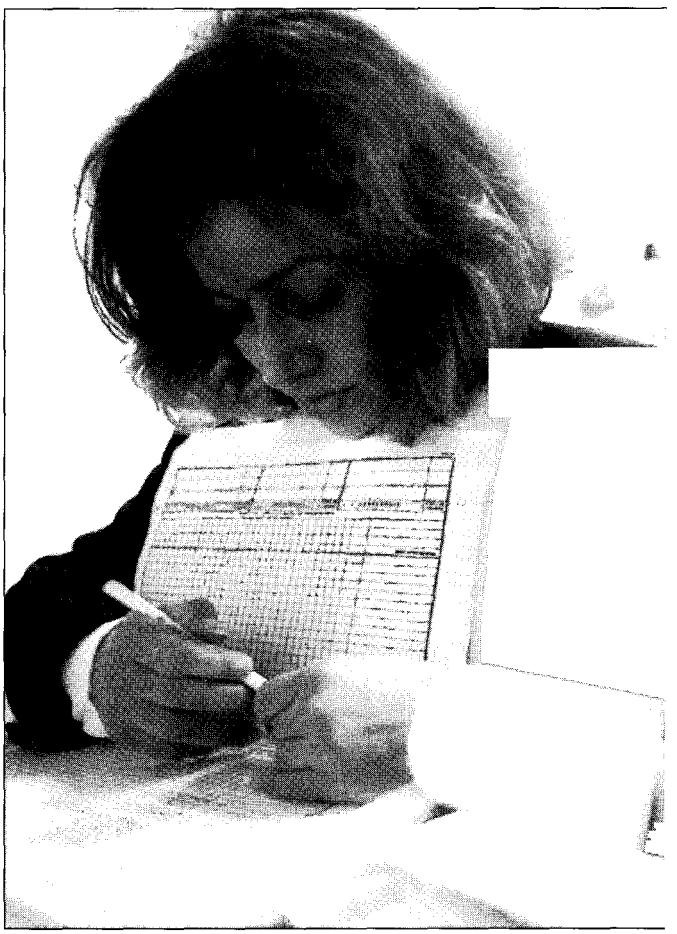
The key is to use the threat of jail time to prod offenders into long-term treatment. More judges seem ready to do so, and it's not hard to see why: In 1971, about 15 percent of all crime in New York was connected to drug use, according to law enforcement officials. Today it's about 85 percent.

"There has been an enormous increase in drug-related crime because the only response of society has been a jail cell," says Brooklyn district attorney Charles Hynes. "But it is morally and fiscally irresponsible to warehouse nonviolent drug addicts." Since 1990, Hynes has helped reshape the city's drug-court system to offer nonviolent addicts a choice: two to four years in prison or a shot at rehabilitation and job training.

Many treatment specialists believe drug therapies will fail unless they're backed up with punishment and other pressures. Addicts need "socially imposed consequences" at the earliest possible stage—and the simplest way is through the criminal-justice system, says Dupont, a former director of NIDA. Sally Satel, a psychiatrist specializing in addiction, says "coercion can be the clinician's best friend."

That may not be true of all addicts, but it took stiff medicine to finally get the attention of Canzada Edmonds, a heroin user for 27 years. "I was in love with heroin. I took it into the bathroom, I took it into church," she says. "I was living in a fantasy. I was living in a world all to myself."

And she was living in Washington, D.C., which in the early 1990s had passed tougher sentencing laws for felony drug offenders. After her third felony arrest, a district judge said she faced a possible 30-year term in prison—or a trip to a residential rehab program. Edmonds went to Teen Challenge in New York in January 1995 and has been free of drugs ever since.



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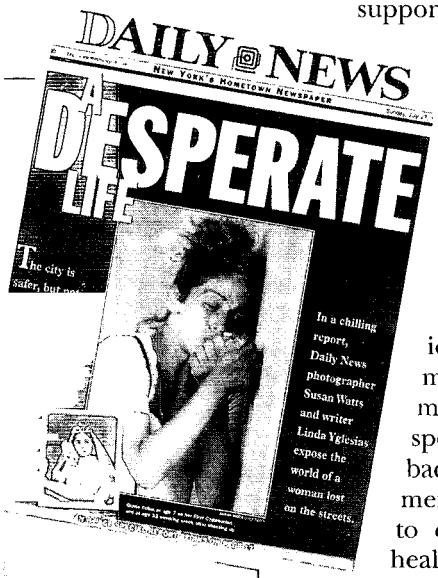
Reducing Harm

Needle-exchange advocates chafe at the thought of coercing drug users into treatment. This signals perhaps their most grievous omission: They refuse to challenge the self-absorption that nourishes drug addiction.

In medical terms, it's called "harm reduction"—accept the irresponsible behavior and try to minimize its effects with health services and education. Some needle exchanges, for example, distribute guides to safer drug use. A pamphlet from an NEP in Bridgeport, Connecticut, explains how to prepare crack cocaine for injection (see box). It then urges users to "take care of your veins. Rotate injection sites . . . ."

"Harm reduction is the policy manifestation of the addict's personal wish," says Satel, "which is to use drugs without consequences." The concept is backed by numerous medical and scientific groups, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the National Academy of Sciences.

In legal terms, harm reduction means the decriminalization of drug use. Legalization advocates, from financier George Soros to the Drug Policy Foundation, are staunch needle-exchange supporters. San Francisco mayor Willie Brown, who presides over perhaps the nation's busiest needle programs, is a leading voice in the harm-reduction chorus. "It is time," he has written, "to stop allowing moral or religious tradition to define our approach to a medical emergency."


DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER
DESPERATE LIFE
The city is safer, but not
In a chilling report, Daily News photographer Susan Watts and writer Linda Yglesias expose the world of a woman lost on the streets.

It is time, rather, to stop medicalizing what is fundamentally a moral problem. Treatment communities that stress abstinence, responsibility, and moral renewal, backed up by tough law enforcement, are the best hope for addicts to escape drugs and adopt safer, healthier lifestyles.

Despite different approaches, therapeutic communities share at least one goal: drug-free living. Though they commonly regard addiction as a disease, they all insist that addicts take full responsibility for their cure. Program directors aren't afraid of confrontation, they push personal responsibility, and they tackle the underlying causes of drug abuse.

The Clinton administration already knows these approaches are working. NIDA recently completed a study of 10,010 drug abusers who entered nearly 100 different treatment programs in 11 cities. Researchers looked at daily drug use a year before and a year after treatment. Long-term residential settings—those with stringent anti-drug policies—did best: Heroin use dropped by 71 percent, cocaine use by 68 percent, and illegal activity in general by 62 percent.

NEP supporters are right to point out that these approaches are often expensive and cannot reach most of the nation's estimated 1.2 million IV drug users. Syringe exchanges, they say, are a cost-effective alternative.

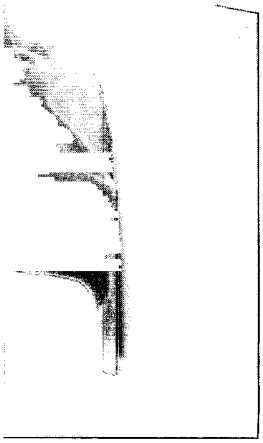
NEPs may be cheaper to run, but they are no alternative; they offer no remedy for the ravages of drug addiction. The expense of long-term residential care surely cannot be greater than the social and economic costs of failing to liberate large populations from drug abuse.

Phoenix House, with residential sites in New York, New Jersey, California, and Texas, works with about 3,000 abusers a day. It is becoming a crucial player in New York City's drug courts, targeting roughly 500 adolescents and 1,400 adults. "Coerced treatment works better than noncoerced," says Anne Swern, a deputy district attorney in Brooklyn. "Judicially coerced residential treatment works best of all."

Nonviolent drug felons are diverted into the program as part of a parole agreement or as an alternative to prison. They sign up for a tightly scripted routine of counseling, education, and work, with rewards and sanctions to reinforce good behavior. Though clients are not locked in at night, police send out "warrant teams" to make regular visits.

Prosecutors and judges like the approach because of its relatively high retention rates. Sixty percent graduate from the program, Swern says, compared to the 13 percent national average for all drug programs. Graduates usually undergo 24 months of treatment and must find housing and employment. Says Horton, "The ability of a judge to tell an addict it's Rikers Island or Phoenix House is a very effective tool."

Narcotics Anonymous (NA), like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), is a community-based association of recovering addicts. Since its formation in the 1950s, NA has stressed the therapeutic value of addicts helping other addicts; its trademark is the weekly group meeting, run out of homes, churches, and community centers.



The New York *Daily News* published a profile in July 1997 of 33-year-old Gloria Colon, a drug addict driven to prostitution to feed her habit. Four months later, the newspaper published a follow-up that showed her clean, motivated, and working in a clothing distribution facility (pictured). All this was prompted by Phoenix House, a 12-to-18-month residential drug treatment program she had entered in August.

Photo by Susan Watts / New York *Daily News*; newspaper image © *Daily News*, L.P. Reprinted with permission

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"You get the benefit of hearing how others stayed clean today, with the things life gave them," says Tim, a 20-year heroin user and NA member since 1995. NA offers no professional therapists, no residential facilities, no clinics. Yet its 12-step philosophy, adapted from AA, is perhaps the most common treatment strategy in therapeutic communities.

The 12-step model includes admitting there is a problem, agreeing to be open about one's life, and making amends where harm has been done. The only requirement for NA membership is a desire to stop using. "Complete and continuous abstinence provides the best foundation for recovery and personal growth," according to NA literature.

As in AA, members must admit they cannot end their addiction on their own. The philosophy's second step is the belief that "a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity." NA considers itself nonreligious, but urges members to seek "spiritual awakening"—however they choose to define it—to help them stay clean.

Needle exchange is not saving the lives of addicts, but abandoning them—to drug-induced death on the installment plan.

Teen Challenge, founded in 1958 by Pentecostal minister David Wilkerson, is a pioneer in therapeutic communities and has achieved some remarkable results in getting addicts off drugs permanently. One federal study found that 86 percent of the program's graduates were drug free seven years after completing the regimen. On any given day, about 2,500 men and women are in its 125 residential centers nationwide.

The program uses an unapologetically Christian model of education and counseling. Moral and spiritual problems are assumed to lie at the root of drug addiction. Explains a former addict, who was gang-raped when she was 13, "I didn't want to feel what I was feeling about the rape—the anger, the hate—so I began to medicate. It was my way of coping." Though acknowledging that the reasons for drug use are complex, counselors make Christian conversion the linchpin of recovery. Ronn Constable says he tried several rehab programs, but failed to change his basic motivation until he turned to faith in Christ. He has been steadily employed and free of drugs for 11 years.

"Sin is the fuel behind addiction," Constable says, "but the Lord says he will not let me be tempted beyond what I can bear." He is typical of former addicts at Teen Challenge, who say their continued recovery hinges on their trust in God and obedience to the Bible. Warns Edmonds, "If you do not make a decision to turn your will and your life completely over to the power of God, then you're going to go right back." Or as C.S. Lewis wrote in another context, "The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of man, and His compulsion is our liberation."

Brave New World?

Whether secular or religious, therapeutic communities all emphasize the "community" part of their strategy. One reason is that addicts must make a clean break not only from their drug use, but from the circle of friends who help them sustain it. That means a 24-hour-a-day regimen of counseling, education, and employment, usually for 12 to 24 months, safely removed from the culture of addiction.

This is the antithesis of needle-exchange outlets, which easily become magnets for drug users and dealers. Nancy Sosman, a community activist in Manhattan, calls the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center and Needle Exchange Program "a social club for junkies." Even supporters such as Bruneau warn that NEPs could instigate "new socialization" and "new sharing networks" among otherwise isolated drug users. Some, under the banner of AIDS education, hail this function of the programs. Allan Clear, the executive director of New York's Harm Reduction Coalition, told one magazine, "There needs to be a self-awareness of what an NEP supplies: a meeting place where networks can form."

Meanwhile, activists decry a lack of drug paraphernalia for eager clients. They call the decision to withhold federal funding "immoral." They want NEPs massively expanded, some demanding no limits on distribution. Says one spokesman, "The one-to-one rule in needle exchange isn't at all connected to reality." New York's ADAPT program gives out at least 350,000 needles a year. "But to meet the demand," says Fatt, "we'd need to give out a million a day."

A million a day? Now that would be a Brave New World: Intravenous drug users with lots of drugs, all the needles they want, and police-free zones in which to network. Are we really to believe this strategy will contain the AIDS virus?

This is not compassion, it is ill-conceived public policy. This is not "saving lives," but abandoning them—consigning countless thousands to drug-induced death on the installment plan. For when a culture winks at drug use, it gets a population of Walters: "Don't get the idea in your mind you're going to control it."

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A Nation Still at Risk

Fifteen years ago, the weaknesses of American education detailed in A Nation at Risk *catalyzed a reform movement that was supposed to radically restructure the nation's schools. A new, follow-up report says not much has changed*

Fifteen years ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education declared the United States a nation at risk. That distinguished citizens' panel admonished the American people that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." This stark warning was heard across the land.

A decade and a half later, the risk posed by inadequate education has changed. Our nation today does not face imminent danger of economic decline or technological inferiority. Much about America is flourishing, at least for now, at least for a lot of people. Yet the state of our children's education is still far, very far, from what it ought to be. Unfortunately, the economic boom times have made many Americans indifferent to poor educational achievement. Too many express indifference, apathy, a shrug of the shoulders. Despite continuing indicators of inadequacy, and the risk that this poses to our future well-being, much of the public shrugs and says, "Whatever."

The data are compelling. We learned in February that American 12th-graders scored near the bottom on the recent Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS): U.S. students placed 19th out of 21 developed nations in math and 16th out of 21 in science. Our advanced students did even worse, scoring dead last in physics. This evidence suggests that, compared to the rest of the industrialized world, our students lag seriously in critical subjects vital to our future. That's a national shame.

Today's high-school seniors had not even started school when the Excellence Commission's report was released. A whole generation of young Americans has passed through the education system in the years since. But many have passed through without learning what is needed. Since 1983, more than 10 million Americans have reached the 12th grade without having learned to read at a basic level. More than 20 million have reached their senior year unable to do basic math. Almost 25 million have reached 12th grade not knowing the essentials of U.S. history. And those are the young people who complete their senior year. In the same period, more than 6 million Americans dropped out of high school altogether. The numbers are even bleaker in minority communities. In 1996, 13 percent of all blacks aged 16 to 24 were not in school and did not hold a diploma. Seventeen percent of first-generation Hispanics had dropped out of high school, including a

On April 3, 1998, influential educators, business leaders, and policymakers representing a variety of ideological and political backgrounds gathered at a conference sponsored by The Heritage Foundation, Empower America, the Center for Education Reform, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation to discuss the state of the nation's education system 15 years after the release of A Nation at Risk. *At the conference's conclusion, the attendees (listed on page 29) endorsed* A Nation Still at Risk, *the education reform manifesto published here.*

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tragic 44 percent of Hispanic immigrants in this age group. This is another lost generation. For them the risk is grave indeed.

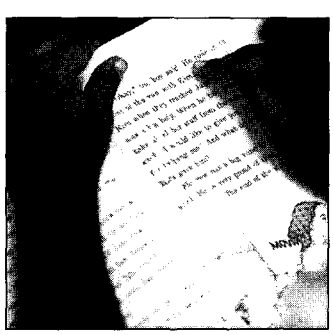
To be sure, there have been gains during the past 15 years, many of them inspired by the Excellence Commission's clarion call. Dropout rates declined and college attendance rose. More high-school students are enrolling in more challenging academic courses. With more students taking more courses and staying in school longer, it is indeed puzzling that student achievement has remained largely flat and that enrollment in remedial college courses has risen to unprecedented levels.

The Risk Today

Contrary to what so many seem to think, this is no time for complacency. The risk posed to tomorrow's well-being by the sea of educational mediocrity that still engulfs us is acute. Large numbers of students remain at risk. Intellectually and morally, America's educational system is failing far too many people.

Academically, we fall off a cliff somewhere in the middle and upper grades. Internationally, U.S. youngsters hold their own at the elementary level but falter in the middle years and drop far behind in high school. We seem to be the only country in the world whose children fall farther behind the longer they stay in school. That is true of our advanced students and our so-called good schools, as well as those in the middle. Remediation is rampant in college, with some 30 percent of entering freshmen (including more than half at the sprawling California State University system) in need of remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics after arriving on campus. Employers report difficulty finding people to hire who have the skills, knowledge, habits, and attitudes they require for technologically sophisticated positions. Silicon Valley entrepreneurs press for higher immigration levels so they can recruit the qualified personnel they need. Though the pay they offer is excellent, the supply of competent U.S.-educated workers is too meager to fill the available jobs.

We seem to be the only country in the world whose children fall farther behind the longer they stay in school.



In the midst of our flourishing economy, we are re-creating a dual school system, separate and unequal, almost half a century after government-sanctioned segregation was declared unconstitutional. We face a widening and unacceptable chasm between good schools and bad, between those youngsters who get an adequate education and those who emerge from school barely able to read and write. Poor and minority children, by and large, go to worse schools, have less expected of them, are taught by less knowledgeable teachers, and have the least power to alter bad situations. Yet it's poor children who most need great schools.

If we continue to sustain this chasm between the educational haves and have-nots, our nation will face cultural, moral, and civic peril. During the past 30 years, we have witnessed a cheapening and coarsening of many facets of our lives. We see it, among other places, in the squalid fare on television and in the movies. Obviously the schools are not primarily responsible for this degradation of culture. But we should be able to rely on our schools to counter the worst aspects of popular culture, to fortify students with standards, judgment, and character. Trashy American culture has spread worldwide; educational mediocrity has not. Other nations seem better equipped to resist the Hollywood invasion than is the land where Hollywood is located.

Delusion and Indifference

Regrettably, some educators and commentators have responded to the persistence of mediocre performance by engaging in denial, self-delusion, and blame shifting. Instead of acknowledging that there are real and urgent problems, they deny that there are any problems at all. Some have urged complacency, assuring parents in leafy suburbs that their own children are doing fine and urging them to ignore the poor performance of our elite students on international tests. Broad hints are dropped that, if there's a problem, it's confined to other people's children in other communities. Yet when attention is focused on the acute achievement problems of disadvantaged youngsters, many educators seem to think that some boys and girls—especially those from the "other side of the tracks"—just can't be expected to learn much.

Then, of course, there is the fantasy that America's education crisis is a fraud, something invented by enemies of public schools. And there is the worrisome conviction of millions of parents that, whatever may be ailing U.S. education in general, "my kid's school is OK."

Now is no time for complacency. Such illusions and denials endanger the nation's future and the future of today's children. Good education has become absolutely indispensable for economic success, both for individuals and for American society. More so today than in 1983, the young person without a solid education is doomed to a bleak future.

Good education is the great equalizer of American society. Horace Mann termed it the "balance wheel of the social machinery," and that is even more valid now. As we become more of a meritocracy the quality of one's education matters more.

Photo by Rocky Kneten

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That creates both unprecedented opportunities for those who once would have found the door barred—and huge new hurdles for those burdened by inferior education.

America today faces a profound test of its commitment to equal educational opportunity. This is a test of whether we truly intend to educate all our children or merely keep everyone in school for a certain number of years; of whether we will settle for low levels of performance by most youngsters and excellence only from an elite few. Perhaps America can continue to prosper economically so long as only some of its citizens are well educated. But can we be sure of that? Should we settle for so little? What about the wasted human potential and blighted lives of those left behind?

Our nation's democratic institutions and founding principles assume that we are a people capable of deliberating together. We must decide whether we really care about the debilitating effects of mediocre schooling on the quality of our politics, our popular culture, our economy and our communities, as dumbing-down infiltrates every aspect of society. Are we to be the land of Jefferson and Lincoln or the land of Beavis and Butthead?

The Real Issue Is Power

The Excellence Commission had the right diagnosis but was vague—and perhaps a bit naïve—as to the cure. The commissioners trusted that good advice would be followed, that the system would somehow fix itself, and that top-down reforms would suffice. They spoke of "reforming our educational system in fundamental ways." But they did not offer a strategy of political or structural change to turn these reforms into reality. They underestimated, too, the resilience of the status quo and the strength of the interests wedded to it. As former commissioner (and Minnesota governor) Albert Quie says, "At that time I had no idea that the system was so reluctant to change."

The problem was not that the Excellence Commission had to content itself with words. (Those are the only tools at our disposal, too.) In fact, its stirring prose performed an important service. No, the problem was that the commission took the old ground rules for granted. In urging the education system to do more and better, it assumed that the system had the capacity and the will to change.

Alas, this was not true. Power over our education system has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few who don't really want things to change, not substantially, not in ways that would really matter. The education system's power brokers responded to the commission, but only a little. The commission asked for a yard, and the "stakeholders" gave an inch. Hence much of *A Nation at Risk*'s wise counsel went unheeded, and its sense of urgency has ebbed.

Today we understand that vast institutions don't change just because they should—especially when they enjoy monopolies. They change only when they must, only when their survival demands it. In other parts of American life, stodgy, self-interested monopolies are not tolerated. They have been busted up and alternatives created as we have realized that large bureaucratic structures are inherently inefficient and unproductive. The private sector figured this out decades ago. The countries of the former Soviet empire are grasping it. Even our federal government is trying to "reinvent" itself around principles of competition and choice. President Clinton has declared that "the era of Big Government is over." It should now be clear to all that the era of the Big Government monopoly in public education needs to end as well.

The fortunate among us continue to thrive within and around the existing education system, having learned how to use it, to bend its rules, and to sidestep its limitations. The well-to-do and powerful know how to coexist with the system, even to exploit it for the benefit of their children. They supplement it. They move in search of the best it has to offer. They pay for alternatives.

Power over our education system has increasingly been concentrated in the hands of a few who don't really want things to change.

But millions of Americans—mainly the children of the poor and minorities—don't enjoy those options. They are stuck with what "the system" dishes out to them, and all too often they are stuck with the least qualified teachers, the most rigid bureaucratic structures, the fewest choices and the shoddiest quality. Those parents who yearn for something better for their children lack the power to make it happen. They lack the power to shape their own lives and those of their children.

Here is a question for our times: Why aren't we as outraged about this denial of Americans' educational rights as we once were about outright racial segregation?

The Next Civil Rights Frontier

Equal educational opportunity is the next great civil rights issue. We refer to the true equality of opportunity that results from providing every child with a first-rate primary and secondary education, and to the development of human potential that comes from meeting intellectual, social, and spiritual challenges. The educational gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students are huge, handicapping poor children in their pursuit of higher education, good jobs, and a better life.

In today's schools, far too many disadvantaged and minority students are not being challenged.

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Far too many are left to fend for themselves when they need instruction and direction from highly qualified teachers. Far too many are passed from grade to grade, left to sink or swim. Far too many are advanced without even learning to read, though proven methods of teaching reading are now well-known. They are given shoddy imitations of real academic content, today's equivalent of Jim Crow math and back-of-the-bus science. When so little is expected and so little is done, such children are victims of failed public policy.

Today's public school, properly construed, is any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to public authorities for its results.

John Gardner asked in 1967 whether Americans "can be equal and excellent" at the same time. Three decades later, we have failed to answer that question with a "yes." We have some excellent schools—we obviously know how to create them—and yet we offer an excellent education only to some children. And that bleak truth is joined to another: Only some families have the power to shape their children's education.

This brings us to a fundamental if perhaps unpleasant reality: As a general rule, only those children whose parents have power end up with an excellent education.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education believed that this reality could be altered by asking the system to change. Today we know better. It can only be altered by shifting power away from the system. That is why education has become a civil rights issue. A "right," after all, is not something you beg the system for. If the system gets to decide whether you will receive it or not, it's not a right. It's only a right when it belongs to you and you have the power to exercise it as you see fit—when you are your own power broker.

Inside the Classroom

Fortunately, we know what works when it comes to good education. We know how to teach children to read. We know what a well-trained teacher does. We know how an outstanding principal leads. We know how to run outstanding schools. We have plenty of examples, including schools that succeed with extremely disadvantaged youngsters.

Immanuel Kant said, "The actual proves the possible." If it can happen in five schools, it can happen in five thousand. This truly is not rocket science. Nor is it a mystery. What is mysterious is why we continue to do what doesn't work. Why we continue to do palpable harm to our children.

Let us be clear: All schools should not be identical. There are healthy disagreements and legitimate differences on priorities. Some teachers like multi-age grouping. Others prefer traditional age-grades. Some parents want their children to sit quietly in rows while others want them to engage in hands-on "experiential learning." So be it. Ours is a big, diverse country. But with all its diversity, we should agree at least to do no harm, to recognize that some practices have been validated while others have not. People's tastes in houses vary, too, yet all residences must comply with the fire code. While differing in design and size and amenities, all provide shelter, warmth, and protection. In other words, all provide the basics.

Guiding Principles

A. Public education—that is, the public's responsibility for the education of the rising generation—is one of the great strengths of American democracy. Note, however, that public education may be delivered and managed in a variety of ways. We do not equate public education with a standardized and hierarchical government bureaucracy, heavy on the regulation of inputs and processes and staffed exclusively by government employees. Today's public school, properly construed, is any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to public authorities for its results.

B. The central issues today have to do with excellence for all our children, with high standards for all teachers and schools, with options for all families and educators, and with the effectiveness of the system as a whole. What should disturb us most about the latest international results is not that other countries' best students outstrip our best; it is that other countries have done far better at producing both excellence and equity than has the United States.

C. A vast transfer of power is needed from producers to consumers. When it comes to education reform, the formulation of the Port Huron Statement (1962) was apt: "Power to the people." There must be an end to paternalism, the one-size-fits-all structure, and the condescending, government-knows-best attitude. Every family must have the opportunity to choose where its children go to school.

D. To exercise their power wisely and make good decisions on behalf of their children, education's consumers must be well-informed about school quality, teacher qualifications, and much else, including, above all, the performance of their own children vis-à-vis high standards of academic achievement.

Strategies for Change

We urge two main renewal strategies, working in tandem:

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I. Standards, assessments and accountability.
Every student, school, and district must be expected to meet high standards of learning. Parents must be fully informed about the progress of their child and their child's school. District and state officials must reward success and have the capacity—and the obligation—to intervene in cases of failure.

II. Pluralism, competition and choice.
We must be as open to alternatives in the delivery of education as we are firm about the knowledge and skills being delivered. Families and communities have different tastes and priorities, and educators have different strengths and passions. It is madness to continue acting as if one school model fits every situation and it is a sin to make a child attend a bad school if there's a better one across the street.

10 Breakthrough Changes for the 21st Century

1. America needs solid national academic standards and (voluntary) standards-based assessments, shielded from government control, and independent of partisan politics, interest groups, and fads. (A strengthened National Assessment Governing Board would be the best way to accomplish this.) These should accompany and complement states' own challenging standards and tough accountability systems.

2. In a free society, people must have the power to shape the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their children. No decision is more important than where and how one is educated. **At minimum, every American child must have the right to attend the (redefined) public school of his choice.** Abolish school assignments based on home addresses. And let the public dollars to which they are entitled follow individual children to the schools they select. Most signers of this manifesto also believe strongly that this range of choices—especially for poor families—should include private and parochial schools as well as public schools of every description. But even those not ready to take that step—or awaiting a clearer resolution of its constitutionality—are united in their conviction that the present authoritarian system—we choose our words carefully—must go.

3. Every state needs a strong charter-school law, the kind that confers true freedom and flexibility on individual schools, that provides every charter school with adequate resources, and that holds it strictly accountable for its results.

4. More school choice must be accompanied by more choices worth making. **America needs to enlarge its supply of excellent schools.** One way to do that is to welcome many more players into public education. Charter schools are not the whole story. We should also harness the ingenuity of private enterprise, of community organizations, of "private practice" teachers and other such education providers. Schools must be free to contract with such providers for services.

5. Schools must not harm their pupils. They must eschew classroom methods that have been proven not to work. They must not force children into programs that their parents do not want. (Many parents, for example, have serious misgivings about bilingual education as commonly practiced.)

6. Every child has the right to be taught by teachers who know their subjects well. It is educational malpractice that a third of high-school math teachers and two-fifths of science teachers neither majored nor minored in these subjects while in college. Nobody should be employed anywhere as a teacher who does not first pass a rigorous test of subject-matter knowledge and who cannot demonstrate their prowess in conveying what they know to children.

7. One good way to boost the number of knowledgeable teachers is to throw open the classroom door to men and women who are well educated but have not gone through programs of "teacher education." A NASA scientist, IBM statistician or former state governor may not be traditionally "certified" to teach and yet may have a great deal to offer students. A retired military officer may make a gem of a middle-school principal. Today, Albert Einstein would not be able to teach physics in America's public-school classrooms. That is ridiculous. Alternative certification in all its variety should be welcomed, and for schools that are truly held accountable for results, certification should be abolished altogether. Colleges of education must lose their monopoly and compete in the marketplace; if what they offer is valuable, they will thrive.

It is a sin to make a child attend a bad school if there's a better one across the street.

8. High pay for great educators—and no pay for incompetents. It is said that teaching in and leading schools doesn't pay enough to attract a sufficient number of well-educated and enterprising people into these vital roles. We agree. But the solution isn't across-the-board raises. The solution is sharply higher salaries for great educators—and no jobs at all for those who cannot do their jobs well. Why should the principal of a failing school retain a paycheck? Why shouldn't the head of a great school be generously rewarded? Why should salaries be divorced from evidence of effectiveness (including evidence that one's students are actually learning what one is teaching them)? Why should anyone be guaranteed permanent employment without regard to his or her performance? How can we expect school principals to be held accountable for results if they cannot decide whom to

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employ in their schools or how much to pay them?

9. The classroom must be a sanctuary for serious teaching and learning of essential academic skills and knowledge. That means all available resources—time, people, money—must be focused on what happens in that classroom. More of the education dollar should find its way into the classroom. Distractions and diversions must cease. Desirable-but-secondary missions must be relegated to other times and places. Impediments to order and discipline must be erased. And the plagues and temptations of modern life must be kept far from the classroom door. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the ability of a knowledgeable teacher to impart solid content to youngsters who are ready and willing to learn it.

10. Parents, parents, parents . . . and other caring adults. It is a fact that great schools can work miracles with children from miserable homes and awful neighborhoods. But it is also a fact that attentive parents (and extended families, friends, et cetera) are an irreplaceable asset. If they read and talk to their children and help them with their homework, schools are far better able to do their part. If good character is taught at home (and in religious institutions), the schools can concentrate on what they do best: conveying academic knowledge and skills.

Hope for the Next American Century

Good things are already happening here and there. Most of the reforms on our list can be seen operating someplace in America today. Charter schools are proliferating. Privately managed public schools have long waiting lists. Choices are spreading. Standards are being written and rewritten. The changes we advocate are beginning, and we expect them to spread because they make sense and serve children well. But they are still exceptions, fleas on the elephant's back. The elephant still has most of the power. And that, above all, is what must change during the next 15 years in ways that were unimaginable during the past 15. We must never again assume that the education system will respond to good advice. It will change only when power relationships change, particularly when all parents gain the power to decide where their children go to school.

Such changes are wrenching. No monopoly welcomes competition. No stodgy enterprise begs to be reformed. Resistance must be expected. Some pain must be tolerated. Consider the plight of Detroit's automakers in the 1980s. At about the same time the Excellence Commission was urging major changes on U.S. schools, the worldwide auto market was forcing them upon America's Big Three car manufacturers. Customers didn't want to buy expensive, gas-guzzling vehicles with doors that didn't fit. So they turned to reliable, inexpensive Asian and European imports. Detroit suffered mightily from the competition. Then it made the changes that it needed to make. Some of them were painful indeed. They entailed radical changes in job expectations, huge reductions in middle management, and fundamental shifts in manufacturing processes and corporate cultures. The auto industry would not have chosen to take this path, but it was compelled to change or disappear.

Still, resistance to structural changes and power shifts in education must be expected. Every recommendation we have made will be fought by the current system, whose spokesmen will claim that every suggested reform constitutes an attack on public education. They will be wrong. What truly threatens public education is clinging to an ineffective status quo. What will save it are educators, parents, and other citizens who insist on reinvigorating and reinventing it.

The stakes could not be higher. What is at stake is America's ability to provide all its daughters and sons with necessary skills and knowledge, with environments for learning that are safe for children and teachers, with schools in which every teacher is excellent and learning is central. What is at stake is parents' confidence that their children's future will be bright thanks to the excellent education they are getting; taxpayers' confidence that the money they are spending on public education is well spent; employers' confidence that the typical graduate of the typical U.S. high school will be ready for the workplace; and our citizens' confidence that American education is among the best in the world.

The decisions we make about education are really decisions about the content of our children's character and the architecture of their souls.

But even more is at stake than our future prosperity. Despite this country's mostly admirable utilitarianism when it comes to education, good education is not just about readiness for the practical challenges of life. It is also about liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is about preparation for moral, ethical, and civic challenges, for participation in a vibrant culture, for informed engagement in one's community, and for a richer quality of life for oneself and one's family. Test scores are important. But so, too, are standards and excellence in our society. The decisions we make about education are really decisions about the kind of country we want to be; the sort of society in which we want to raise our children; the future we want them to have; and even—and perhaps especially—about the content of their character and the architecture of their souls. In the last decade of this American Century, we must not be content with anything less than the best for all our children.

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* Mr. Marshall dissents from that portion of recommendation #2 that would have public dollars flow to private and parochial schools on the same basis.

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El Millonario Next Door

The untold story of Hispanic entrepreneurship

By Tyce Palmaffy

Many Americans seem to regard the nation's Hispanics with apprehension. Their high poverty rates, low education levels, and tendency to create separate cultural enclaves feed a perception that Hispanics are not following the upwardly mobile immigrant path worn by their Asian, European, and Middle Eastern predecessors.

America, meet Bartolo Lopez.

In 1970, at age 17, Lopez crossed the Mexican border into California with barely enough money to pay the "coyote"—immigrants' slang for the guide hired to bring them illegally across the border. At first he, like many Mexican immigrants, labored in the fields of northern California. Finding that wearisome, he began working for a Japanese gardener, who taught him the art of landscape design: skills such as reading blueprints, placing boulders, and creating waterfalls.

After earning legal residency as a licensed landscape technician, Lopez joined a landscaping firm in Los Angeles for several years. But when a recession hit in 1982, his salary dropped by half. That setback drove him to start 3 Pinos Landscaping, a landscape design and maintenance firm.

At first he was stuck mowing residential lawns, but within a year he had 10 employees and design projects ranging from $10,000 to $100,000. His business now takes in nearly $2 million in annual revenues serving a predominately upper-middle-class clientele. And Lopez, who once worked dusk-to-dawn picking strawberries for pennies, now earns nearly $100,000 a year designing and creating opulent backyard Xanadus for the San Fernando Valley's upper crust.

The Flowering

The qualities that prompted Lopez to launch his own enterprise are the same ones that brought him to America in the first place: a penchant for risk-taking and a willingness to sacrifice and work hard in pursuit of a better life. These attitudes are typically strong among immigrants, and they help to explain why a vibrant entrepreneurial culture is developing within the Hispanic community. Indeed, Latinos, more than a third of whom are foreign-born, represent the nation's fastest-growing pool of business owners—a deeply encouraging sign of their desire to join preceding waves of immigrants in pursuit of the American Dream.

From 1987 to 1992, the last year for which Census Bureau statistics are available, the number of U.S. businesses owned by Hispanics rose 76 percent, from 490,000 to 863,000. Meanwhile, the number of U.S. firms overall grew by just 26 percent, from 13.7 million to 17.3 million. During the same period, total receipts for Hispanic-owned firms more than doubled, from $32.8 billion to $76 billion, at a time when receipts for all U.S. firms grew by only 67 percent, from $2 trillion to $3.3 trillion. In the space of a decade, from 1982 to 1992, the number of His-

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panic-owned firms nearly quadrupled. Assuming similar growth rates since 1992 (a conservative assumption considering the U.S. economy's strong recent performance), the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce estimates that Hispanics now own 1.3 million U.S. businesses generating more than $200 billion in annual revenues.

The overall size of the Hispanic business community is not yet as impressive as its recent growth. Although they are 11 percent of the U.S. population, Latinos owned just 5 percent of all firms in 1992, accounting for 2 percent of gross receipts. Nearly half of all Hispanic-owned businesses earned less than $10,000, and only 15 percent had paid employees. Only two Hispanic-owned firms, Burt Automotive Network and Goya Foods Inc., made *Forbes* magazine's 1997 listing of the nation's 500 largest privately held companies.

That Hispanic entrepreneurs have some catching up to do should not be surprising. The median age of Latinos is more than a decade younger than America's non-Hispanic whites, and the newly arrived immigrants among them tend to have a limited grasp of English, scant capital, and few sophisticated work skills. They haven't been running firms long enough to expand through reinvesting profits and developing a strong customer base.

Hispanic entrepreneurial growth might be compared more usefully with that of other, equally young minority groups, such as Asians and blacks, the other minorities surveyed by the Census Bureau. In 1992, Hispanics in this country owned 43 percent more firms than Asians, widely known for their prolific business formation. The number of Hispanic-owned firms also grew faster than Asian-owned companies between 1987 and 1992. Relatively speaking, however, Asians still come out ahead. They make up only 3 percent of the population, yet their smaller number of firms still generated 26 percent more total receipts than Hispanic-owned concerns.

Hispanic business ownership has already surpassed that of blacks, a racial group of similar size, and appears to have done so without as much reliance on government assistance. With 12 percent of the nation's population, blacks as a group owned 242,000 fewer firms in 1992. The average black-owned firm earned only $52,000 that year, slightly more than half the Hispanic average. (This might be partly explained by the fact that blacks tend to own businesses in the low-cost states of the South, Hispanics in relatively high-cost states.)

As one of the largest minority business set-aside programs in the federal government, the Small Business Administration's Section 8(a) program is a good indicator of the degree to which different minority groups depend upon government help. Of the 6,183 firms certified last year to participate in the program, which limits competition for certain government contracts to small, minority-owned firms, blacks owned 45 percent, Hispanics only 25 percent. "When you compare the Hispanic and black business worlds," says Joel Kotkin, a senior fellow at the Pepperdine School of Public Policy, "Hispanics have traditionally been much more tied into the private sector of the economy."

As an L.A.-based real-estate developer, Jose Legaspi combines business with a social mission: bringing goods and services to underserved Latino communities.

Photo by Axel Koester

The soaring growth of the Hispanic business community is not only lifting Hispanic incomes. It is also revitalizing neglected areas of cities where Hispanics have established a strong presence. Along Florence Avenue in South Central Los Angeles, a once predominately black community, many of the storefronts destroyed during the 1992 riots have been replaced by small, Hispanic-owned retail stores and mini-marts. In Chicago, Hispanic jewelers, restaurateurs, and clothing retailers control commerce along 26th Street, generating sales-tax revenue second only to Michigan Avenue, Chicago's wealthiest retail strip. And, as Peter Beinart reported in the *New Republic*

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in 1997, Roosevelt Avenue in Queens, New York, is lined with the small shops established by Ecuadorean, Dominican, Columbian, and Mexican immigrants who have moved in only during the past two decades.

City of Latinos

Just as the blanket terms "Latinos" and "Hispanics" gloss over the variety of races and ethnicities among Latin Americans, aggregate statistics don't even begin to describe the varied character of Latino-owned businesses, from the newer immigrant startups in Los Angeles to the larger and more profitable media firms of Miami.

In Los Angeles, the Hispanic population has grown so large and prosperous that banks have started advertising in Spanish and real-estate firms hire bilingual sales agents to cater to the Latino market. Unsurprisingly, the city boasts the most Hispanic-owned firms of any U.S. metropolitan area, just ahead of Miami. According to UCLA's Center for the Study of Latino Health, the number of businesses in Los Angeles County owned by Latinos—mostly Mexican Americans—has nearly doubled since 1992, from 109,000 to 210,000. If those estimates are correct, nearly one-sixth of all Latino-owned businesses in the U.S. are located in L.A. County.

These businesses range from La Reina Inc., Mauro Robles's $40-million Mexican-food-manufacturing enterprise, to the small tacquerias that dot the city's neighborhoods. In Venice Beach, Latinos occupy small retail stalls that sell everything from sunglasses to Muscle Beach t-shirts; in Reseda, their retail shops dominate the indoor swap meets.

Latinos such as Francisco Pinedo, a furniture maker, have also helped to create a boom in light manufacturing, including toys, clothing, and food, that has made L.A. County the largest manufacturing center in the nation. Pinedo's father, a Mexican migrant worker, brought his family to South Central L.A. when Pinedo was 12. A short time later, his father hurt himself and his mother fell ill, leaving Francisco to support the family. He dropped out of the 11th grade and began working full-time at a local upholstery shop.

Soon he became an upholsterer at a larger company, where he worked for nine years. After brief employment at a smaller firm, Pinedo decided it was time to start his own enterprise. "My goal was always to have my own company," he says.

At age 27, with about $11,000 in savings, Pinedo opened an upscale furniture-manufacturing firm in a small garage while his wife continued to work to pay the bills. When he was working for the larger company, Pinedo had developed a small but wealthy personal clientele by making custom furniture at night and on the weekends. They became the first clients of Cisco Brothers, his fledgling business. His strategy was to manufacture the sort of sofas, chairs, and loveseats customers would ordinarily purchase from expensive upholstery shops. With the craftsmanship and expertise gleaned from years of factory work, Pinedo figured out how to make high-end furniture at a lower cost than his competitors. "I knew how to make a sofa worth $7,000 for $300," says Pinedo. Since 1990, the firm has grown from two brothers working in a garage to a 125-employee enterprise based in a South Central factory. Last year, Cisco Brothers earned $9 million in revenues.

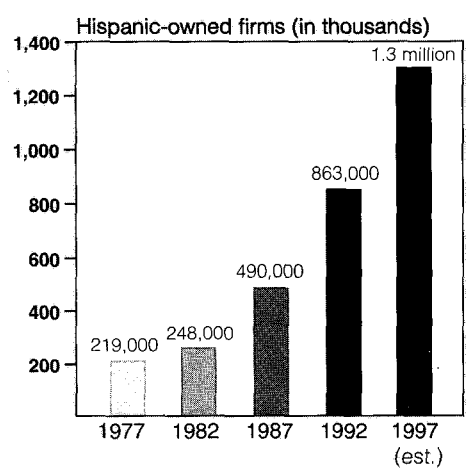
For the most part, Mexican immigrants living in California entered the United States with little formal schooling or English proficiency, and no way of supporting themselves besides grudging factory toil—at best. They want the trappings of middle-class life—a home, furniture, perhaps a car—so they take minimum-wage jobs and do "a lot of work after work," says Pinedo. "They are always building stuff on the weekends to make extra money." Often they move into blighted areas such as South Central. There they find cheap homes, often fixer-uppers, that they share with one or two other families. If all goes well, their children will receive good educations and live easier lives.

Their growing numbers and purchasing power—annual estimates range from $250 billion to $350 billion nationwide—have in turn created new market opportunities for Hispanic entrepreneurs. Rising car ownership creates a need for auto mechanics; newly purchased televisions create a need for Spanish-language stations. Economists call this a virtuous cycle: Consumption begets business opportunities, which beget jobs, which beget more consumption, and so on.

The growing Latino population has also created a new class of entrepreneurs: Latino middlemen who leverage their education and knowledge of the Latino community into lucrative consulting work for established companies who desire insight into Hispanic consumer behavior. Jose Legaspi recognized this market before nearly anyone else. In the late 1970s, after stints in real-estate sales, advertising, and insurance, he formed the Legaspi

The Latino Boom

The number of Latino-owned firms in the United States has soared in the past two decades.



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

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Company, a real-estate development and consulting firm. It combines business with a social mission: establishing firms that provide needed goods, services, and jobs to underserved Latino communities. He began to represent national concerns such as Blockbuster Video and McDonald's. "A lot of national companies did not know how to deal with Latinos" as customers or employees, says Legaspi, a Mexican immigrant himself. "They need to know what kinds of goods and services to offer and what days are important for an Hispanic worker to take off."

They also need to reach the Latino market through advertising, as the Orcí family well knows. Together, brothers Roberto and Hector Orcí and Hector's wife Norma own and operate La Agencia de Orcí & Asociados, a $46-million international advertising agency that specializes in reaching Hispanics. Although Roberto and Hector were born in Mexico, they are not typical Mexican entrepreneurs. They boast master's degrees from top-flight U.S. graduate schools and several years' experience with major advertising firms. The agency started in 1986 when Hector and Norma took the Hispanic division of a large international firm private; they brought Roberto in two years later. Their first major client, the U.S. government, hired them for an advertising campaign conducted in 48 different languages. Its purpose was to inform illegal immigrants of new laws granting amnesty if they met certain requirements.

Their clients now include Honda Motors, Pepsi, Allstate, and other national and regional marketers. "There are 30 million Hispanics in the U.S. and they prefer entertainment in Spanish," says Roberto. "Companies hire us to reach that target, and it takes the same level of sophistication and expertise as any other type of marketing."

Gateway to Latin America

Although Latino-owned firms are less numerous in Miami than in Los Angeles, in 1992 their total revenue exceeded that of their L.A. counterparts by more than $4 billion. That's because Miami is the center of a mature business community dominated by Cuban Americans, who owned only 12 percent of Latino firms in the United States but earned more than one-fifth of the revenues.

Unlike most Hispanic immigrants to this country, many of the Cubans fleeing Fidel Castro's Communist regime in the early 1960s were professionals and businessmen. When they settled in Miami, they set about establishing an infrastructure of Latino culture and commerce. More than three decades later, Miami possesses the flavor of a Latin American city and the bustle of an international trading hub.

This is an environment tailor-made for entrepreneurs like Rafael Puga. Born in Chile, he came to the United States after receiving a degree in biology from the University of Chile. Shortly after he arrived in Miami, a friend in Chile asked if he could sell 40,000 pounds of fresh grouper. Finding little demand in Florida, he flew to California and worked the yellow pages. Puga moved the entire shipment within a few days, and a new career was born.

His business, Beagle Products Inc. (named for Charles Darwin's ship, the HMS Beagle), now acts as the nation's primary importer of fresh sea bass, salmon, and swordfish from Chile and Costa Rica. When Puga first started the business in the early 1980s, most imported fish came into the country frozen. He changed that by working with Chilean fishermen to develop new fishing techniques that keep fish fresh longer.

Although Puga's firm prepares some value-added products, such as frozen, boneless portions, his main business is quickly packaging and shipping fresh catch to wholesalers and restaurants. After a short stay in Puga's Miami warehouse, the daily cargo is bound for dinner plates in Boston, Houston, and Los Angeles. Puga's success really lies in doing what everyone else thought could not be done. "Nobody had tried bringing fresh fish by plane before," he says. His initial risk now generates $20 million in annual revenues and a host of copycat competitors.

"I have never felt discriminated against as a Hispanic," says Rafael Puga. "If I have the right price and the right product, they don't care if I'm American or Chilean."

Puga, much like Jose Legaspi and the Orcís, is using his Hispanic heritage to advantage, acting as the middleman between predominately Anglo-run American wholesalers and Chilean fishermen and exporters. There is a lesson here: In a diverse nation and global economy, few skills will be more highly valued than the ability to operate in various cultures and parts of the globe. Firms that shun Hispanic partners will just be hurting their own bottom line. "I have never felt discriminated against as a Hispanic," says Puga. "If I have the right price and the right product, they don't care if I'm American or Chilean."

Escaping the Niche

For every Hispanic businessman who is leveraging his ethnicity, however, there are dozens whose ethnicity has nothing to do with their businesses. Latinos are moving into every field, from major telecommunications firms to candle manufacturers. The most successful ones, like Bartolo Lopez and Francisco Pinedo, acquire skills and

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business acumen working for larger firms, build their savings, and, often with the help of family and friends, finally go into business for themselves.

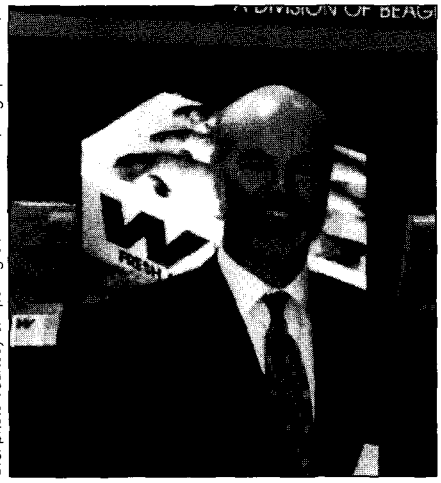
That's the path Annette and Victoria Quintana took. Annette worked as a sales representative for IBM before deciding, at age 28, that the time was ripe to move into ownership. "I wasn't married, I had no children, the car was paid for, and I could live on $800 a month," says Annette. "I didn't have a whole lot to lose."

In 1990, she started Excel Professional Services, a computer consulting firm. She recruited her sister, Victoria, who was then working for MCI as a product manager, to run the business side of operations while Annette drove sales. And drive them she has. Last year, sales reached $22 million, up from $17 million the year before.

Based in Denver, Excel hires technical experts to solve computer problems, including the Year 2000 bug, for large corporations such as Lucent Technologies and Time Warner. But at a time when federal agencies are scrambling to fix their ancient computer systems, Annette and Victoria decided to avoid government contracting altogether. "We determined that we would need three times the required administrative staff to fill out the paperwork required for government, while profitability is a half to a third of the private, commercial sector," says Annette.

In developing Excel's business plan, Annette and Victoria surveyed dozens of minority firms certified under the federal Small Business Administration's 8(a) program. What scared them away from government contracting was the type of work given to 8(a) companies. "The government will not do 8(a) set-asides on future-oriented business," says Annette. "They don't bring 8(a) companies in to replace old technology, they bring them in to babysit the old system. That's not what you want to build your business or train your employees on." She relates stories of 8(a) firms retaining former high-level government officials to play golf with their old colleagues—to speed up contracts. Instead, the Quintanas hire well-compensated salespeople (on the low end, they earn $100,000 to $160,000 a year) to aggressively cold call the technical and systems divisions of large corporations.

On a far smaller scale, there's Norma and David Estrada, owners of Estrada's Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning in Houston, Texas. Neither has a college education; they grew up poor and married early. After they were both laid off by Continental Airlines, David started working for Sears, Roebuck & Co. as a carpet cleaner and soon decided he could better serve customers on his own. With a $500 loan from his parents, the Estradas bought a carpet cleaning machine and—voilà!—they were in business.



The many faces of Hispanic entrepreneurialism: Hector and Norma Orcí own a $46-million international advertising agency (above); Rafael Puga's Beagle Products is one of the largest importers of fresh fish in the nation (left); sisters Annette and Victoria Quintana's computer consulting firm purposely avoids government contracts.

Orcí photo courtesy of Spelling Communications; Puga photo courtesy of Beagle Products Inc.; Quintana photo by James Baca

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Their finances remained tight for the first few years—they grossed $7,000 in 1993—so they subsisted on welfare and received a cheap mortgage through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Though still cash-strapped, they went off welfare in 1994. "It was just a pain to go down and give the records every month," says Norma. "We had a lot of friends and family members who gave us stuff for garage sales, and we sold half our furniture." They joined the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, which has put them in contact with both commercial and government purchasing managers. That helped to secure their largest contract—cleaning carpets at a few federal office buildings at the Port of Houston Authority—as well as contracts with a local country music station and several Marriott hotels in Houston.

Their gross revenues have nearly doubled each year to reach $96,000 in 1997, and they have poured most of the money back into the business. "We have what we need to survive and the business is growing," says Norma. "We eat lots of beans and rice, but in Mexico I would be considered rich for what I have now."

Government's Role

In some fields, particularly construction, technology, and environmental contracting, affirmative-action policies at the federal, state, and local levels have played a significant role in the growth of many Hispanic-owned businesses. But almost 60 percent of Latino firms and 50 percent of Latino revenues are concentrated in services and retail, sectors largely unaffected by government procurement or contracting. Hispanics have also achieved greater business success in a shorter period of time than blacks despite their more limited ties to government.

Many Hispanic firms would depend at least partly on government work, with or without minority set-asides. For instance, Delgado Erectors Inc., a Chicago-area firm with $8 million in annual revenues, erects structural steel for high-rise buildings and bridges. Owner Dominic Delgado, a veteran construction foreman, relies heavily on government contracts because that's who builds bridges and mass-transit systems. Delgado blames nepotism and the "old boy network" in the building trades for his inability to secure much private work. "We can handle almost any project in the city of Chicago," says Delgado, "but private industry doesn't look at us yet; they maintain relationships with their friends for years."

The real danger for Hispanic-owned firms that pursue government contracts is failing to diversify. City Wide Security Services Inc., a Latino-owned security firm established in Brooklyn, New York, in the early 1970s, relies almost exclusively on government contracts, from guarding NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center to New York City government buildings. The firm earned $23 million in 1995, but revenues plummeted to $1 million last year after another security company underbid City Wide on its largest contract, the World Trade Center in New York City.

That bolsters a point made by Bennett Santana, owner of Business Systems of America, a temporary-staffing service based in Chicago. "Eventually the [government] money runs out and these people need to go out into the market and compete and it's a shock," he says. "The 8(a) programs shelter them from what the real world is."

"We have what we need to survive and the business is growing," says Norma Estrada. "We eat lots of beans and rice, but in Mexico I would be considered rich for what I have now."

The Future

Whether the Hispanic business community will ever match the success of other immigrant groups will ultimately depend more on their collective competence than on their ability to reap government set-asides. That means improving their general education levels and nurturing their entrepreneurial spirit.

Their steady improvement will be important because the nation's economic health will become increasingly tied to Hispanics' well-being. By 2010, they will surpass blacks to become the nation's second-largest racial/ethnic group. In Miami, where Hispanics are already the majority, and California, where Hispanics are projected to be the largest ethnic group by the year 2025, the health of the regional economy already depends on a vibrant Latino community.

Unfortunately, political leaders still insist on treating Hispanics as yet another beleaguered minority in need of preferential treatment. In his famous 1995 "mend it, don't end it" speech to the National Council of La Raza, an Hispanic advocacy group, President Clinton mentioned "affirmative action" 22 times without once acknowledging the tremendous gains Hispanics have made in the business world. This attitude runs the risk of cultivating an entitlement culture rather than one of can-do entrepreneurialism within the Hispanic community. Fortunately, Hispanics generally seem far more intent on self-reliance than on playing racial politics.

Tyce Palmaffy *is the assistant editor of* Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship.

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Liberalism's Mean Streets

How conservatives can reverse urban decline

By Senator Dan Coats and Senator Spencer Abraham

American liberalism has always been centered in our cities. That is where government subsidies have traditionally been most generous and government regulations most onerous. If there were any basis for liberals' faith in the power of big, bureaucratic programs to improve people's lives, we should see it in the form of prosperous, socially vibrant inner cities.

Unfortunately for urban Americans, no such evidence exists. The liberal love affair with Big Government policies has cost urban areas a great deal. Our cities, for so long the center of public life, have suffered economic stagnation and social breakdown. These severe problems have followed—indeed, we would argue, directly resulted from—ill-conceived government policies that have discouraged small business, punished families, and hampered local associations' efforts to maintain safe and nurturing environments.

Indications of liberalism's failure are all around us. But perhaps most damning is the massive flight of citizens from our urban areas. Since the mid-1960s, America's largest 25 cities have collectively lost about 4 million residents. St. Louis, for example, experienced a 32 percent drop in population between 1972 and 1992. Detroit lost 50 percent during the same period, and other cities like Boston, Baltimore, and Cleveland have seen significant declines.

Those who remain have been increasingly surrounded by violence and poverty, with few of the social and community resources Americans once took for granted. The rate of child poverty in central cities, 33 percent, is more than twice that of suburban areas. More than a third of inner-city children in families are being raised by mothers alone. Violent crime increased 500 percent between 1960 and 1990. And all this came about while we were spending $5 trillion for a "War on Poverty."

Faced with this massive suffering, conservatives cannot and must not turn away. Harsh experience has proven that Big Government programs destroy the social capital on which healthy families and

Photo by Roberto Matassa / Uniphoto

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communities rely. We must help free communities from rules and regulations as they seek to rebuild. Conservatives should welcome this chance to show that community and opportunity can solve the problems caused by Big Government. As we seek to build a governing coalition and a healthier society, we must put our beliefs to work helping liberalism's urban victims.

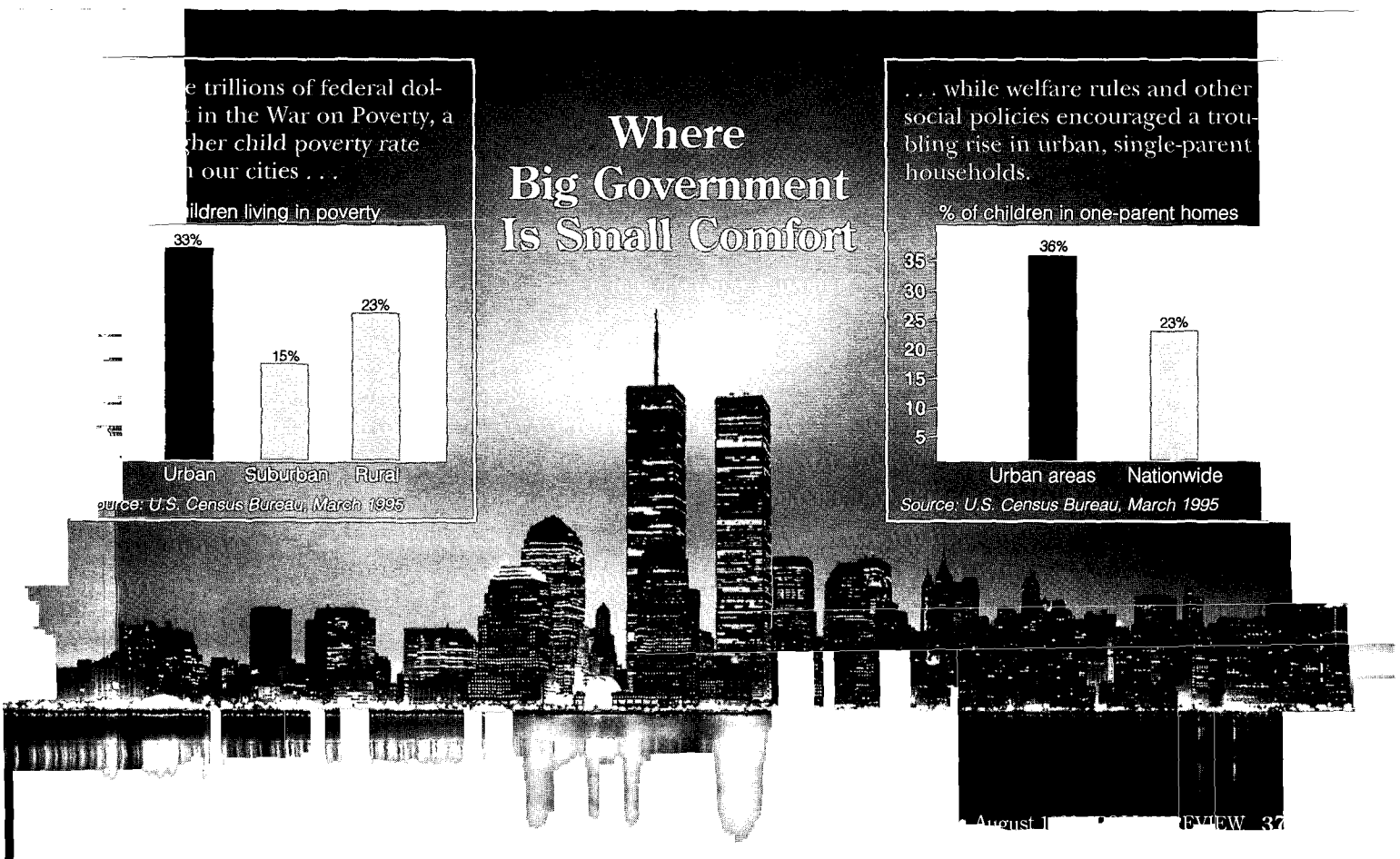
We also must keep in mind that so-called urban problems are no longer exclusive to big cities. From illegitimacy and poverty to crime and drug abuse, small cities and rural areas are feeling the effects of decades of Big Government liberalism.

Crime in particular has been described as a big-city problem, but statistics tell a more complex story. From 1994 to 1995, the eight American cities with at least a million residents saw a 6.4 percent drop in total crime. Crime rates in these cities have dropped for 6 consecutive years. Homicide rates dropped 11 percent in 1997 alone. But crime in a number of smaller cities is on the rise. Louisville, Kentucky's 68 homicides last year, for example, were a 17-year high. Fort Wayne, Indiana, had 37 killings in 1997 compared with 13 in 1996, while Nashville had a record 112 murders. Rural areas experienced a 6 percent surge in robberies and a 4 percent increase in auto thefts last year. Jack Levin, the director of Northeastern University's Program for the Study of Violence, blames complacency: "Small towns thought they were immune from teenage violence and didn't prepare for the onslaught."

In many areas the onslaught is just beginning. James Alan Fox, also of Northeastern, notes that "adult crime is way down. . . . Meanwhile, the population of teenagers is beginning to rise." Fox notes that these teenagers "have too much television and not enough supervision." The breakdown of families has been central to the rise of crime, and in many areas the situation is getting worse.

For decades, liberal social programs that provide assistance only to families without fathers have encouraged families to break up or discouraged them from forming at all. Ironically, these programs were justified in part by the liberal claim that they would eliminate the "root causes" of crime—economic disadvantage. But crime rates shot through the roof during the War on Poverty. Worse, liberal programs have coincided with the explosion of a critical cause of crime and most other forms of social dysfunction our cities face: family breakdown.

After rising for decades, overall illegitimacy rates appear to have stabilized—but at dangerously high levels. About 32 percent of all American births take place out of wedlock, up from 8 percent in 1965. And broken families are at the heart of our social problems. William Stanczykiewicz, the policy director for community development under Indianapolis mayor Stephen Goldsmith, notes, "Out-of-wedlock births drive all other social challenges we have. Illegitimacy rates here reach



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41 percent, and that is too high. Despite the courageous efforts of many single parents, we know that their children are far more likely to do poorly in school, to abuse drugs, and to commit crimes."

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead observed in 1993 that the relationship between single-parent families and crime "is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime." Whitehead also observed that illegitimacy significantly increased the likelihood of welfare dependency, poor educational performance, drug use, and even suicide.

The president promised a market-based empowerment agenda for troubled communities. Unfortunately, more, not less, bureaucracy has been the rule.

The social fabric holding together even our healthier communities is beginning to tear. If we are to save them, conservatives must offer an alternative to Big Government. It is up to us to show that communities, working together, can achieve what liberal programs have failed to do: help people in need without breaking down the civic associations and incentives necessary to encourage people to get an education, delay childbearing until marriage, work hard, and build decent lives.

Too Little Empowerment

In recent years, we have seen Big Government repackaged to look community-friendly. President Clinton came into office promising to implement a market-based empowerment agenda for troubled communities. In their 1992 campaign book *Putting People First,* Bill Clinton and Al Gore wrote, "We believe in free enterprise and the power of market forces. We know economic growth will be the best jobs program we'll ever have." Unfortunately, more bureaucracy, not less, has been the rule. To get the benefits of President Clinton's "empowerment zones," local officials have to present comprehensive community-development proposals to an "Enterprise Board" in Washington. No wonder Jack Kemp called the Clinton zones "a throwback to the top-down, paternalistic policies which have dominated liberals' thinking on poverty since the Great Society."

Atlanta's community-development officials note that Clinton's enterprise communities typically undergo a 24-month "planning" period. The product of these lengthy and expensive bureaucratic efforts has been more bureaucracy. From a renewed industrial development board in Los Angeles to several new "partnerships" overseeing government loans, local bureaucracies have been the main beneficiaries of the Clinton zones.

Meanwhile, troubled communities receive precious little actual assistance in their efforts to rebuild. The nine Clinton empowerment zones created so far qualify for minor tax breaks, including an employment tax credit and an increase in business expensing. Hundreds of other communities qualify for a share of $280 million in annual social-services block grants.

These zones are anemic. The wage credits benefit only existing businesses, and there are no significant tax incentives to spur the creation of entrepreneurial businesses and investment in distressed communities. Worse, the block grants, used to fund many local bureaucracies, perpetuate the failed notion that government can create jobs and prosperity in America's inner cities. The zones promote government, not private enterprise. Nor do Clinton zones bring significant relief from local taxes and regulations on entrepreneurial activity. Clinton zones lack the essential elements necessary to revitalize troubled communities: freedom and flexibility, incentives to invest, and more room for local associations to play a major role in reforming people's lives.

Attracting Business

Since they were first proposed by Jack Kemp in 1980, enterprise zones have been intended to help communities with unusually high levels of poverty and unemployment. These areas suffer from mutually reinforcing economic and social problems. Yes, we must address social problems made worse by anti-family welfare programs of the past, but we must also address the lack of economic opportunities in distressed areas. Empowerment zones must be "supercharged." If they are to attract businesses and the jobs that come with them, cities must be allowed to offer substantial tax incentives.

Perhaps the biggest step is the elimination of capital gains taxes for distressed areas. For decades now, states and localities have competed to attract new and expanding businesses and the jobs they generate. Right now, struggling urban areas do not have much bargaining power in this competition. By eliminating capital gains taxes in empowerment zones, the federal government could substantially reduce the tax burden endured by job creators in these areas.

Jersey City mayor Brett Schundler says, "It is time for the federal government to put in place incentives that will help us rebuild. By zeroing out capital gains taxes, the federal government can help us compete for jobs and business and thereby revitalize our city."

The Need for Choice

Another key element missing from existing zones is school choice. Despite polls showing that inner-city poor people are demanding greater con-

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trol over their children's education, the Clinton administration has ignored this crucial aspect of any plan to revitalize our cities. This denies poor urban families control over their children's education and consigns them to substandard schooling. As a result, a number of liberal Democrats, including minister and former congressman Floyd Flake of New York and Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut have endorsed school choice as a means of empowerment for urbanites.

With some exceptions, inner-city public schools are generally failures. *Education Week* recently reported that only 40 percent of fourth- and eighth-graders in urban schools had scored at a basic level in reading, math, and science tests. Liberal tax-and-spend policies have not worked. In Washington, D.C., the prototype for big-city largesse, the government spends $7,300 per pupil in public schools. This is more than twice the $3,100 per pupil spent by the average private school. The results? Washington suffers from a secondary-school dropout rate of 40 percent and test scores that are among the lowest in the nation.

Not surprisingly, then, in cities like Detroit, choice scholarship supporters outnumber opponents three to one. Detroit's Council of Baptist Pastors argues that school choice "is a civil right, as basic as democracy, because it lets families vote with their feet on the best school for their child. . . . It is an injustice that our present system denies our children an equal opportunity for a quality education."

Empowerment programs cannot work without school choice. Maryland's Calvert Institute commissioned a poll examining the effects of education on population flight from the city of Baltimore. Despite its empowerment zone, Baltimore loses 1,000 people a month, net. Worse, says the report, "Most of the leavers were just the sort of young, middle-class people the city must retain." Why are they leaving? Among parents of school-age children, 31 percent cited the schools as their main reason for leaving. Fifty percent named education among their top three reasons.

The poll also found that 51 percent of leavers with school-age children might have considered staying in Baltimore had there been school choice and vouchers. Among African Americans in this group, the figure was 70 percent. If cities want to stop the flight of their working and middle classes, they must adopt school-choice programs. Under such a program, according to the Calvert Institute, "up to 4,600 families might be induced to stay in Baltimore annually."

One place where school choice has played a role in local urban politics has been Milwaukee. There Democratic mayor John Norquist is working to expand the city's highly successful school-choice program. According to David Riemer, the city's director of administration, "The single biggest reason middle- and working-class people leave Milwaukee and many other cities is education. Thousands of families every year leave because they do not want to risk having their child end up with a bad teacher or in a bad school. The competitive pressure school choice puts on schools to improve is the single best way to bring people back into the cities."

School choice also empowers parents. As the Detroit Pastors reported on their examination of school choice programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland, "At school after school, we saw a new kind of educational environment emerging because of choice. Parents were welcomed into the classroom and given active roles of influence and respect in the school. And district schools were working harder to keep parents, multiplying popular programs."

Parental involvement is critical to educational success. Thus it is no surprise that school-choice programs have improved test scores by involving parents. A recent University of Houston/Harvard report shows that students participating in the Milwaukee choice experiment made major academic improvements compared with a public-school control group. Students in their fourth year of the choice program increased their reading scores by 5 percentage points and their math scores by 12 percentage points.

Parental involvement also incorporates parents into the community. School choice must be an integral part of any empowerment strategy because it is necessary to bring parents and local leaders together. Where the Clinton program has allowed Big Government to micromanage local communities, successful reform must create more opportunity and incentive for local communities to rebuild themselves.

If big cities want to retain their working and middle classes, they must adopt school-choice programs.

Real Life

Empowering people in our cities will require real, community-based empowerment zones that provide real tax incentives and real reforms aimed at empowering parents and community leaders.

Over the last 18 months, 30 members of the House and Senate have developed a comprehensive empowerment plan. We call it "Real Life"—"Renewal, Empowerment, Achievement and Learning for Life." We believe it embodies the elements essential for helping low-income families and communities reach self-sufficiency. It includes three components: economic empowerment, community renewal, and educational opportunity, each

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of which we outline below.

Economic empowerment. We want to nurture the economic renaissance of our cities. One of the great underreported stories of our booming economy is the role of tight labor markets in forcing businesses to look to inner cities for workers. For example, worker shortages in Wisconsin last year prompted Allen-Edmonds Shoes to move a major facility to inner-city Milwaukee. Allen-Edmonds turned to local churches to find qualified employees, underlining the relationship between social and economic capital. Elsewhere, cities like Indianapolis are aggressively seeking to bring businesses into poor neighborhoods by reducing regulation and expediting licensing applications.

To encourage this trend, we would designate America's 100 poorest neighborhoods (a significant majority of them urban) as "renewal communities" and target them for pro-growth tax and regulatory relief. Our plan would eliminate the capital gains tax for investments in these areas, increase tax write-offs for plant and equipment purchases, and give businesses a 20 percent wage credit for hiring qualified, low-income workers. In exchange, states and localities would have to reduce taxes and fees within the renewal community and waive local and state occupational licensing regulations.

Community renewal. We must strengthen the churches and volunteer groups that bind communities together and heal individual lives. Building on the 1996 welfare reform, we would encourage states to transfer more authority and resources to nonprofit groups through a charity tax credit. States would give their citizens the choice of contributing a significant portion of their tax liability to private efforts working in their communities.

Many Americans already are doing the work necessary to rebuild our communities. Beginning in urban areas, their efforts can guide us in restoring hope and opportunity to both cities and suburbs. The most interesting results in this area are arising when public reform efforts are matched to private support. In Ottawa County, Michigan, Governor John Engler's "Project Zero" has aimed new rules and resources at an area of mixed urban and suburban sites. The goal: reduce to zero the number of welfare recipients without any earned income. Ottawa County achieved this goal last September, in part by providing publicly funded transportation, mentoring, and day-care services to help welfare recipients get and keep jobs. But this is not just a handout. Those who refuse to comply with work requirements have their welfare checks cut by 25 percent, and face the prospect of losing aid altogether if they do not find work in three months.

These public reforms have been joined to the efforts of Ottawa County's local churches. Federal welfare reform has freed the community and its churches to help literally hundreds of residents of Ottawa County off welfare, with the aid of neighbors providing advice, rides to work, and emotional support. This community knows that neighbors can do far more to help people in need than a simple check from the government.

The close-knit relationships fostered in such communities are helping welfare recipients find their way to stable jobs, stable homes, and the stable habits needed to keep them. Welfare reform legislation should help reverse welfare dependency and the breakdown of community. But the bulk of the work must be done by communities themselves, and by churches, private entrepreneurs, and citizens.

Education. Our legislation calls for a large-scale test of publicly funded scholarships for poor children. These scholarships would provide immediate relief for families and bring badly needed competition into the public-school system.

Ottawa County, Michigan, proved that neighbors can do far more to help people in need than a simple check from the government.

Educational reforms will not only improve the performance of urban students, they will improve the performance of urban communities. For too long, poor urban residents have been trapped in an uncaring, unresponsive system that regards them as unqualified to judge what is best for their own children. Milwaukee and Cleveland show that school choice can free parents from this trap, allowing them to retake control over their children's education and broader areas of their community lives. No wonder 63 percent of parents in Cleveland were "very satisfied" with the academic quality of their chosen schools, compared with less than 30 percent of public-school parents.

Schools were once critical parts of our communities. They must again become so. And that requires that we empower people to play a full role in their children's education. Parents meeting together to improve their children's education will naturally go on to discuss other topics of public importance, from crime to drug use to local economic conditions. Combined with a renewal of small businesses that provide convenient meeting places for neighbors, these contacts can help rebuild the nexus of social institutions that once protected children and families from crime, abuse, and neglect. By revitalizing schools, voluntary associations, and the economy, we can help people in our distressed urban areas to rebuild their communities.

***Dan Coats**, a Republican, is a U.S. senator from Indiana. **Spencer Abraham**, also a Republican, is a U.S. senator from Michigan.*

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On Self-Government

Families, congregations, and civic associations are America's most important "schools of liberty." The progressive project threatens them all

By Michael S. Joyce

In his breathtaking new book, *A History of the American People*, English historian Paul Johnson writes, "The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures. . . . The great American republican experiment . . . is still the first, best hope for the human race" and "will not disappoint an expectant humanity."

It is often noted that outside observers of the American experiment tend to express a more profound appreciation for the remarkable achievements of our nation's Founders than we do ourselves. Burke and Talleyrand, Gladstone and Tocqueville, Thatcher and Maritain have all marveled at the truth of a proposition that, before the exceptional birth of freedom here, had been considered at best problematic: that the people have the capacity to govern themselves.

Following this well-trodden path, but with a somber note of caution, is Pope John Paul II. When Lindy Boggs, the newly designated U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, recently came to present her credentials, John Paul took the occasion to remind her that our great experiment in self-government left America with a "far-reaching responsibility, not only for the well-being of its own people, but for the development and destiny of peoples throughout the world."

John Paul then embarked upon an eloquent review of the fundamental principles upon which American self-government is based. The Founding Fathers, he noted, "asserted their claim to freedom and independence on the basis of certain 'self-evident' truths about the human person: truths which could be discerned in human nature, built into it by 'nature's God.' Thus they meant to bring into being, not just an independent territory, but a great experiment in what George Washington

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called 'ordered liberty': an experiment in which men and women would enjoy equality of rights and opportunities in the pursuit of happiness and in service to the common good."

It was outrageous enough, to contemporary sensibilities, for John Paul to connect self-government to the notion of eternal human attributes implanted by God. But he then went further, suggesting that self-government did not imply simply freedom to live as one wishes, but rather the capacity to fulfill one's duties and responsibilities toward family and toward the common good of the community. The Founding Fathers, he noted, "clearly understood that there could be no true freedom without moral responsibility and accountability, and no happiness without respect and support for the natural units or groupings through which people exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others."

In this remarkable discourse, John Paul identified several critical features of American self-government: that it is rooted in a view of human nature governed by self-evident truths that are fixed forever in the human person by "nature's God"; that the political consequence of human truth is an irrefutable case for self-government, so long as our freedom is shaped and ordered by moral and civic virtue; and that we come to be fully human, fully moral, and fully free only within "natural units or groupings"—family, neighborhood, church, and voluntary association—which we form to pursue the higher purposes of life.

The Two Meanings of Self-Government

How does this sophisticated understanding of self-government compare with our own understanding at home? Ours, I regret to say, tends to be a rather superficial, political view. Self-government to us means simply doing whatever we, collectively as citizens, choose to do.

But we see in John Paul's message a second and more substantial understanding of self-government—that it must mean, as well, our capacities as individuals for personal self-mastery, for reflection, restraint, and moral action. And here is the critical, uncomfortable fact: In a well-ordered republic, government of the self is necessary for government of society to work.

The authors of the *Federalist Papers* are famed for their clear-eyed assessment of the weaknesses of human nature and their careful arrangement of governing institutions to minimize those flaws. James Madison nevertheless wrote in *Federalist* No. 55 that "as there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. *Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.*" [Emphasis added.] If people were as bad as some opponents of the Constitution said, he wrote, "the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government."

A people deficient in moral restraint or civic virtue, Madison understood, could not long govern itself; unbounded human passions would finally tear the republic to pieces. Utterly undisciplined peoples are not fit for self-government, he insisted, but require "nothing less than the chains of despotism [to] restrain them from destroying or devouring one another."

Cultivating Self-Government

But how are American citizens to acquire the moral self-mastery required for self-government? To be sure, the Founders did not suppose that their new government would seek directly to inculcate those virtues in its citizens. Rather, as *Federalist* No. 55 suggests, American self-government "presupposes" moral self-mastery. Here again, John Paul's remarks help us understand what this means.

Not only does freedom mean moral responsibility, he insisted, but there can be "no happiness without respect and support for the *natural units or groupings* through which people exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others." Alongside the formal and artificial constructs of American government, in other words, there stand certain "natural units or groupings," such as family, church, neighborhood, and voluntary association, that are responsible for the full development of human character through rigorous and sustained moral and civic education.

The Founding Fathers "clearly understood that there could be no true freedom without moral responsibility and accountability."
—Pope John Paul II

Photo by Michael Okoniewski / Catholic News Service

It was precisely the great efflorescence of these natural groupings in America that Alexis de Tocqueville understood to be the key to the perpetuity of our free and democratic political and social institutions. For they take into their bosom the unformed child and, through tireless repetition and reinforcement of the same moral lessons over a lifetime, slowly forge a morally responsible human being. They serve as the first and most important "schools of liberty," introducing the morally self-governed individual to the broader public

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rights and responsibilities of the self-governing republican citizen.

It probably never occurred to the Founders that the centrality of such presupposed, bedrock civil institutions could be forgotten or neglected. But we are now nearing the end of a century that has shown anything but "respect and support" for the institutions of civil society that undergird our noble experiment in self-government.

How did we arrive at this parlous state of affairs? How could it be that we require instruction from a spiritual leader from abroad on our own nation's political underpinnings—on the apparently forgotten importance of moral self-mastery and civic virtue to self-government?

The Legacy of Progressivism

For this, we may thank American progressive liberalism and its ambitious quest over the past century to build a great "national community." Perhaps the most eloquent and forceful formulation of this quest is to be found in Herbert Croly's *The Promise of American Life* (1909). Croly called for the creation of a genuine national community, a far-flung family of millions whose members would be bonded tightly by feelings of compassion and neighborliness.

In Croly's words, there would be a "subordination of the individual to the demand of a dominant and constructive national purpose." A citizen would begin to "think first of the State and next of himself," and "individuals of all kinds will find their most edifying individual opportunities in serving their country." Indeed, America would come to be bound together by a "religion of human brotherhood," which "can be realized only through the loving-kindness which individuals feel . . . particularly toward their fellow-countrymen." To preach this new religion of national brotherhood, we would require a powerful, articulate president—"some democratic evangelist, some imitator of Jesus."

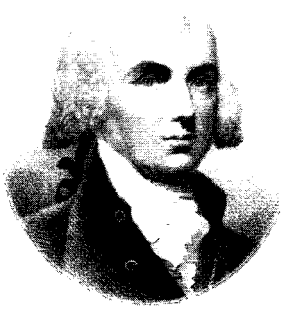
What, then, becomes of all those countless petty, parochial, partial communities of family, neighborhood, and local association? Why, we must transfer their authority and responsibilities upward, to a powerful, centralized national government, which will embody and develop the national community.

Does not this transfer of authority away from civic institutions undermine them, and thereby erode the foundations of civic virtue? Of course it does, but progressive liberalism never entrusted the fate of its grand project to ordinary citizens and their presupposed civic virtue. Rather, the governance of the new national community was to be in the hands of trained, professional elites schooled in this century's new sciences of society.

The new, omnipotent social sciences taught that public affairs could now be rooted firmly in objective and statistical facts gathered by researchers, turned into public policy by centralized, nonpartisan, often unelected public agents operating at considerable remove from the untutored opinions of the toiling masses, and executed by "scientific managers" organized systematically into vast, bureaucratic pyramids.

The American republic would no longer require civic virtue from the ordinary citizen, nor moral and civic training by the natural groupings. It would require only the scientific expertise of its trained, governing elites. Indeed, civic virtue, insofar as it rested on a view of man as a religious being, was not only unnecessary in the new national community, but downright noxious. Religion, characterized by so many benighted and retrograde sects and schisms, tended to divide and distract the popular sensibility that enlightened science was now trying to harness to coherent, rational public projects.

There are qualities in human nature "which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form."
—James Madison



If self-government, understood politically, no longer required civic virtue, what of self-government understood morally, as the self-mastery required for the full enjoyment of freedom? Clearly, the progressive social sciences raised serious questions about the need for any such self-mastery. Science had come to understand that human nature is not rooted in certain self-evident truths fixed by "nature's God," because there is no nature and there is no God.

And so the self is foolish if it continues to submit its pleasures and passions to entirely mythic natural or divine norms, or to steer by the now obviously arbitrary rules of families, neighborhoods, and churches. Far better if the passions are given full and free play, to serve as guideposts in the self's new and daunting task of expressing or creating itself, in the face of a relativistic and contingent universe.

In this dispensation, the most important—indeed, virtually the only—political virtue becomes absolute tolerance of the myriad forms of self-expression. Since the self is by nature nothing, self-

Photo by Corbis-Bettmann

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government means to be governed by nothing. Anything goes; the only sin is judgment.

If judgment is sin, however, the new regime of tolerance is soon discovered to be massively intolerant in one crucial respect: It cannot abide the presence or the open public participation of those who base their views on an idea of absolute truth, especially religious truth. Emptied of any moral content, of any deluded notion about moral self-mastery, self-government is now to be understood only in the most superficial political sense, as the power of the majority to do what it wills, indifferent to notions of right and wrong.

Small wonder that Pope John Paul believed it necessary to issue this warning to Ambassador Boggs, after his discussion of our founding principles: "It would be a sad thing if the religious and moral convictions upon which the American experiment was founded could now somehow be considered a danger to free society, such that those who would bring these convictions to bear upon your nation's public life would be denied a voice in debating and resolving issues of public policy."

Progressive Politics Today

We might think that the new progressive republic would be profoundly repellent to the average American. But if we are to prepare ourselves to challenge the progressive republic, then we must first understand fully its enormous and corrosive appeal. To be sure, the citizen is asked to forgo engagement in the everyday affairs of his immediate community. But that was a great hassle, anyway. Now he may sit back, relax, and express his idiosyncratic self, with none to judge him. Experts are always available and eager to take over the responsibilities of community affairs, at which they profess to be more adept. Even something as seemingly personal as family responsibilities can—and if we listen to the experts, should—be turned over to day-care workers, family therapists, and teachers. After all, it takes a professionally credentialed, therapeutic village to raise a child.

None of this, of course, will be presented to the citizen as a loss of freedom. Instead, it will be explained that government is simply supplying the goods and services necessary for the citizen to achieve his full potential, to express himself ever more freely, having been relieved by government of the inhibiting responsibilities of caring for family and community.

To be sure, the moment may come when the individual finds idiosyncratic self-expression to be too lonely or too demanding, even with the therapeutic state providing the material and psychological wherewithal. But the warm, comforting bosom of the national community always beckons, promising the lonely self a renewed sense of purpose, belonging, and membership. The late Robert Nisbet explained more eloquently than anyone the paradoxical but nonetheless direct link between modernity's full liberation of the individual self, and the self's subsequent eagerness to be reabsorbed into the modern state's great community once it realizes just how alone in the cosmos it truly is.

Dependent Individualism

To appreciate some of the real and immediate dangers posed by the progressive republic, we may examine a realistic portrait of what our republic might look like under the most comprehensive implementation of progressivism's vision. The picture is provided by Fred Siegel's splendid book, *The Future Once Happened Here* (1997), which surveys the recent history of New York City, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., the three great American urban centers where liberalism has en-

Photos by Steven Senne / *World*

Aided by the Bradley Foundation, Milwaukee's civic entrepreneurs are revitalizing the city: Principal Jeff Monday's Messmer High School (above), a Catholic school located in a gritty area, graduates 97 percent of its seniors. Many of them attend with the help of school vouchers. Cordelia Taylor turns gutted buildings into nursing homes for the elderly poor (left). Bill "Deacon" Lock's ministry cultivates businesses in inner-city neighborhoods.

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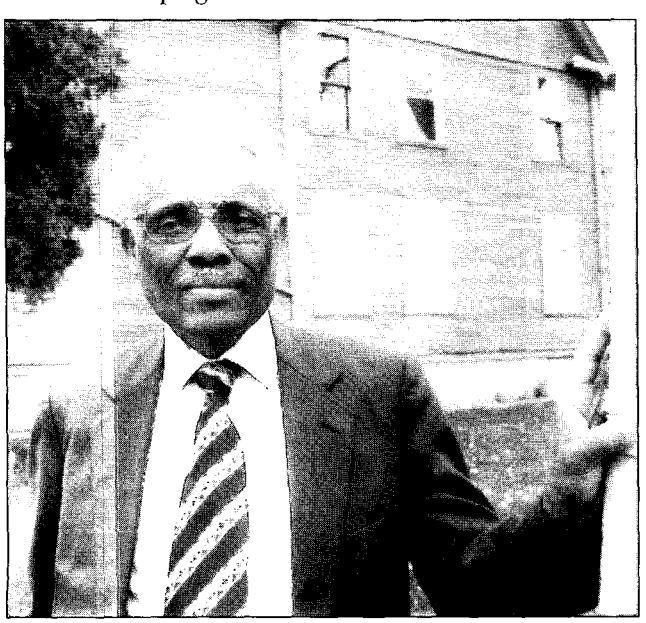
joyed its most long-lasting and secure grasp on the levers of public policy.

So what do we find? The radical politics of the 1960s, Siegel notes, introduced to New York City in particular a philosophy of what he calls "dependent individualism." Government elites expanded their regulatory reach into every corner of the city's economy, he noted, slowly strangling free and productive economic activity. At the same time, liberalism "looked to judicially minted individual rights to undermine the traditions of social and self-restraint so as to liberate the individual from conventional mores." Self-liberation soon precipitated the utter collapse of natural groupings like the family, neighborhood, and community. The result was not a liberated utopia, but explosions of crime, welfare dependency, teen pregnancy, and a host of other pathologies.

The only beneficiary of this wholesale collapse was, as he puts it, the "state-supported economy of social workers and other members of the 'caring professions,' who, whatever their good intentions, came to live off the personal failings of the big cities' dependent populations." With the tax base shrinking and the multitude of government-supported dependents and their "helpers" growing, New York City—once the liveliest and most energetic metropolis in the world—had by the 1980s become a lifeless and anoxic swamp of human dysfunction, saddled with an enormous and inefficient government it could no longer afford.

Can we not catch in this gloomy portrait a glimpse of our nation's future under progressive liberalism? Is it not time that we draw the necessary conclusions from this experiment with "dependent individualism"? For surely by now we see that the project of liberation from the natural groupings of family and community is immediately responsible for the social pathologies that have come to plague us as a nation.



Once invited in, the service providers eagerly expand the definition of treatable trauma, making the self ever more acutely aware of the burdens imposed upon our personal creativity by other human beings—especially parents, spouses, and children. The therapeutic state, in turn, insists on absorbing yet more authority and function from society's repressive natural groupings, eroding them still further.

That this process leads to an ever more expensive and meddlesome "nanny state" is, in some respects, the least of our problems. The far graver threat is that we permit ourselves gradually to come under the thrall of the benevolent, professional governing elites. In our moral and spiritual debasement, we relinquish all claim to self-government in even the most immediate and basic aspects of our lives. We become less and less capable of even minimal levels of productive human endeavor, to say nothing of civic activity.

The progressive project of liberating the people from family and community is immediately responsible for the social pathologies that plague us as a nation.

By now many readers will have heard echoes of the famous passage in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, in which he struggles to describe the "species of oppression" most likely to menace democratic society in the modern age. Its way is prepared when all the natural groupings that once drew the individual into active association with others have disappeared, and he now "exists only in himself and for himself alone." Above this idiosyncratic self-creator will rise "an immense and tutelary" power, a power that is "absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild." For its citizens this benevolent government "willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principle concerns, directs their industry. . . . What remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the care of living?" This all-encompassing power "does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals of which government is the shepherd."

Signs of Civic Vitality

As we ponder this depressing but prescient portrait of America as a nation of timid sheep, we ask ourselves: Is there to be found no sign of hope, no glimmer of discontent or unrest, no hint of spirited rebellion against such a degrading state of af-

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fairs? Happily, there is. I am pleased to report that, in the schools and neighborhoods of inner-city Milwaukee, a great citizen insurrection is even now underway, known as parental choice in education.

Over the past decade, more and more of Milwaukee's inner-city parents have decided that they've had enough of sophisticated education methods that teach their children to be spontaneously creative, but that have somehow neglected to teach them to read and write. They've had enough of the public schools' "enlightened," uninhibited moral atmosphere, which leaves their children helplessly exposed to the creative self-expression of drug dealers and armed thugs. They've had enough of teachers and counselors who tell them, if they complain about their children's failure to flourish in these chaotic, liberated classrooms, that their children suffer from some arcane learning disability or pathology—requiring, of course, consignment to a government-subsidized therapeutic program.

When these parents try politically to challenge this system within their school, they rapidly discover that education is perhaps that segment of American life most assiduously organized according to the progressive science of management. Lines of accountability run ever upward and away from the neighborhood school, through layers upon layers of bureaucrats, to distant centers of power inhabited exclusively by insulated, arrogant professional elites.

With the help of privately and publicly funded vouchers, low-income parents all over Milwaukee are opting out of progressivism's school system. Many of them are turning instead to schools that believe the human self is less something to be expressed than to be shaped or molded, its impulses brought firmly under the tutelage of rigorous moral and religious doctrines. In these schools, hallways are quiet and classrooms orderly, because they are disciplined moral communities. Expectations for performance and behavior are elaborate and demanding, precisely the sort of "repressive" atmosphere that progressivism disdains. Students are treated with utmost respect even, or especially, when being disciplined, because they are understood to be responsible and accountable creatures of God, endowed with all the dignity the Founders believed every American citizen to possess. Although the schools reflect a variety of moral and religious traditions, they share a commitment to the education of self-governing citizens who are both morally self-disciplined and able to participate knowledgeably in the governance of the community and the republic. The schools, in turn, are centers of the surrounding community's public life and commitment to citizenship.

In short, having come face to face with the human devastation wrought by progressivism's program of self-liberation and management by insulated elites, parents instinctively turn back to institutions that reflect the divinely inscribed and eternal character of human nature, that understand freedom to require moral self-mastery, and that root the child securely in at least one natural grouping that nurtures him and prepares him for a productive role in family, neighborhood, church, and voluntary association.

"It is activity on a small, human scale that creates the fabric of community, a framework for the creation of abundance and liberty."
—Ronald Reagan

Photo by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

Inspired by this courageous uprising against the social service state, we at the Lynde and Bradley Foundation have begun to look around the country for similar indications of civic vitality in our inner-city neighborhoods. And we find them everywhere. In city after city, grass-roots groups have grown weary of waiting for some progressive expert to arrive and undo the damage inflicted upon their neighborhoods by progressive self-liberation. Borrowing from Tocqueville's art of association, they begin to form neighborhood patrols to suppress crime and gang warfare, community facilities to care for the young and the elderly, programs to reclaim the drug- and alcohol-addicted, housing agencies to construct low-cost housing, and community development corporations to bring economic vitality back to the city.

The Bradley Foundation hopes to spread those convictions, and thereby stimulate similar initiatives, in other communities throughout the nation. We call this program the "new citizenship."

At the heart of these initiatives is the belief that it's time for Americans to stop regarding themselves as passive, helpless clients of the bureaucratic social-service state and start thinking of themselves once again as proud, self-reliant citizens, capable of running their own affairs. But this requires the restoration of the idea of self-government in its older, more comprehensive sense of personal and moral self-mastery. It is no surprise that a great many effective community efforts are faith-based, with the summons to moral self-mastery rooted in a view of human nature as governed by certain "self-evident truths" planted therein by a real and benevolent God. Only a human being confident of the eternal truth inscribed in his soul will be able to resist, not only the call of the streets, but also the subtle allure of dependency upon the state.

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New citizenship initiatives remain the best way to instill the moral habits of self-mastery in the child through constant repetition and reinforcement, and are also the main schools for teaching civic responsibility and accountability. To help reinvigorate these critical civic institutions, a new citizenship must reverse progressivism's transfer of authority and function to centralized state bureaucracies. Only if civic institutions once again have substantial and meaningful functions to perform will they be able to serve as effective teachers of citizenship skills and civic virtue. Decentralization alone will not automatically lead to a revival of civic virtue; it is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition thereof.

Will a New Citizenship Spread?

But will the larger audience of Americans, those in the comfortable middle class who have not experienced so tangibly the failure of progressivism, heed the message of the new citizenship? After all, such Americans are themselves the recipients—and, in many cases, the suppliers—of a vast range of services offered or mandated by the therapeutic state. In short, is there any likelihood that the renewed idea of self-government could become the basis of a major citizens' movement among Americans at large, or will it be contained in isolated pockets of the nation and ultimately strangled?

Just over two decades ago, many Americans were asking themselves this same despairing question as we faced humiliation abroad and double-digit inflation and run-away growth in government at home. The establishments of both major political parties had long since resigned themselves to this state of affairs, so Americans gradually became accustomed to dramatically diminished expectations. Of course Big Government was bloated and inefficient; of course Big Government spent and taxed too much; but, of course, Big Government was here to stay.

But then, up from Dixon, Illinois, via Sacramento, California, came a political figure almost unanimously ridiculed by the political and intellectual elites of both parties. In late September 1975, he gave a speech entitled "Let the People Rule," in which he boldly attacked the federal government's "collectivist, centralizing approach" to our problems. "Thousands of towns and neighborhoods," he said, "have seen their peace disturbed by bureaucrats and social planners, through busing, questionable education programs, and attacks on family unity." The speaker seconded liberal Richard Goodwin's view that "the most troubling political fact of our age [is that] the growth in central power has been accompanied by a swift and continual diminution in significance of the individual citizen, transforming him from a wielder into an object of authority."

And then the speaker issued this stirring summons:

"I am calling for an end to giantism, for a return to the human scale—the scale that human beings can understand and cope with; the scale of the local fraternal lodge, the church congregation, the block club, the farm bureau. It is the locally owned factory, the small businessman who personally deals with his customers and stands behind his product, the farm and consumer cooperative, the town or neighborhood. . . . It is this activity on a small, human scale that creates the fabric of community, a framework for the creation of abundance and liberty. The human scale nurtures standards of right behavior, a prevailing ethic of what is right and what is wrong, acceptable and unacceptable."

The speaker, of course, was Ronald Reagan, the former governor of California. His speech laid the theoretical foundations for his landslide presidential victory in 1980, and guided this century's first serious effort to trim federal programs and to reinvigorate our nation's states and civic institutions. As he explained in his first Inaugural Address, President Reagan simply refused to share progressivism's view "that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government of, by, and for the people."

Abraham Lincoln understood the long-term moral effect of slavery on American self-government. If there are no inalienable rights of liberty and equality, then any man is subject to being enslaved.

Photo by Corbis

Why did the American people, including vast portions of the comfortable middle class, respond to President Reagan's summons to renew our commitment to self-government and moral self-mastery within our "human scale" communities? I suspect it's because we understand in our bones that these commitments are somehow fundamental to us as a people—they make us who we are. Once the choices are made clear to us, as they always were by President Reagan, then we will always choose self-evident truth, civic virtue, and civil society's natural groupings over the bribes of the progressive elites, no matter how generous the social services or seductive the self-liberation. The only time we seem to choose otherwise is when the choices are *not* made clear to us—when, say, a progressive candidate for president creates a new persona just in

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time for the election that appears to stand precisely for these traditional American principles.

The Enduring Struggle for Self-Government

Perhaps, more broadly, it is the defining American experience periodically to revisit this struggle between self-government and civic virtue, on the one hand, and comfortable materialism and moral cynicism, on the other. Engaging in that struggle, in moments of crisis, may well be the way we come to rededicate ourselves to certain enduring propositions at the heart of our great nation. That was certainly the consequence of the greatest struggle over our national soul, a critical chapter of which unfolded in that famous political contest between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln.

Drawing on historian Harry Jaffa's brilliant recreation of the arguments in that 1858 Senate campaign, we recall that Senator Douglas faced the great moral question of his time, the issue of chattel slavery, and famously pronounced that he "[doesn't] care whether it is voted up or down." Douglas was a proponent of today's hollow, contemporary view of self-government, defined simply as the morally indifferent "competence of the people to decide all questions, including those of right and wrong," as Jaffa notes. In fact, any discussion about *absolute* right and wrong, any appeal to transmajoritarian moral values, actually endangered democratic government, in his view, only fueling the fury of moral extremists.

Happily, Lincoln understood the long-term moral effect of slavery on American self-government and denounced Douglas's views as contrary to the principled understanding bequeathed us by the Founders. There are certain divinely inspired "self-evident truths" embedded in the Declaration, he insisted, according to which slavery was unequivocally "a moral, social, and political wrong." And by that fixed moral standard we must firmly guide our conduct if we are to remain free.

Without the divinely inscribed "self-evident" truths in the human soul, there is no sure foundation for human freedom and self-government.

To do otherwise—to act as if the Declaration's truth did not exist—was not only to leave slaves to their bondage. It was also to deny the possibility of self-government for anyone anywhere, he understood. If there are no rights of liberty and equality accruing to man as a matter of irreducible moral principle, then any one of us is subject to being enslaved to the man whose self-interest or passion may so incline him, and whose force of self-expression is greater than ours.

Thus, Jaffa writes, Lincoln professed that he "hated" Douglas's position, because "it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty—criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting there is no right principle of action but self-interest."

Do we not find in Abraham Lincoln's views the definitive response to those who argue that self-government means simply majority will? To those who would deny the idea of self-government's moral foundation in self-evident truths, and would drive moral discourse from our politics?

As we face today's confusions and misconstructions about the American principle of self-government, it may be comforting for us to look back at the great contest between Lincoln and Douglas, finding there the assurance that this is by no means the first generation of Americans—nor will it be the last—to be tempted by wrong-headed and relativistic understandings of what self-government means. Even more should we be comforted by the realization that in that great moment of testing nearly a century and a half ago, we Americans had the wisdom and the courage to decide the issue of self-government aright.

And so today, when progressivism says to us that there is no nature's God, and so no divinely inscribed "self-evident truths" in the human soul, let us reply that without such truths, there is no sure foundation for human freedom and self-government. When progressivism insists that the human being is utterly free to create or express himself without limits, let us reply that "there can be no moral freedom without moral responsibility and accountability," and no political freedom without civic virtue. When progressivism insists that family, neighborhood, church, and voluntary association are parochial and repressive constraints on our self-expression, let us reply that only through such institutions can we as free people "exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others," and come to a proper understanding and practice of self-government.

With our past as the foundation of our hope, let us embrace this new struggle over the meaning of self-government, as the means by which we may once again refresh our flagging spirits at the wellsprings of our national character. Not daring, at such a critical moment, to rely solely upon our own arguments and devices, let us join Pope John Paul II in his prayer that "our country will experience a new birth of freedom, freedom grounded in truth and ordered to goodness."

Michael S. Joyce *is the president and CEO of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This article is adapted from an address he gave in Oak Brook, Illinois, on April 23, 1998, as part of The Heritage Foundation's 25th anniversary lecture series.*

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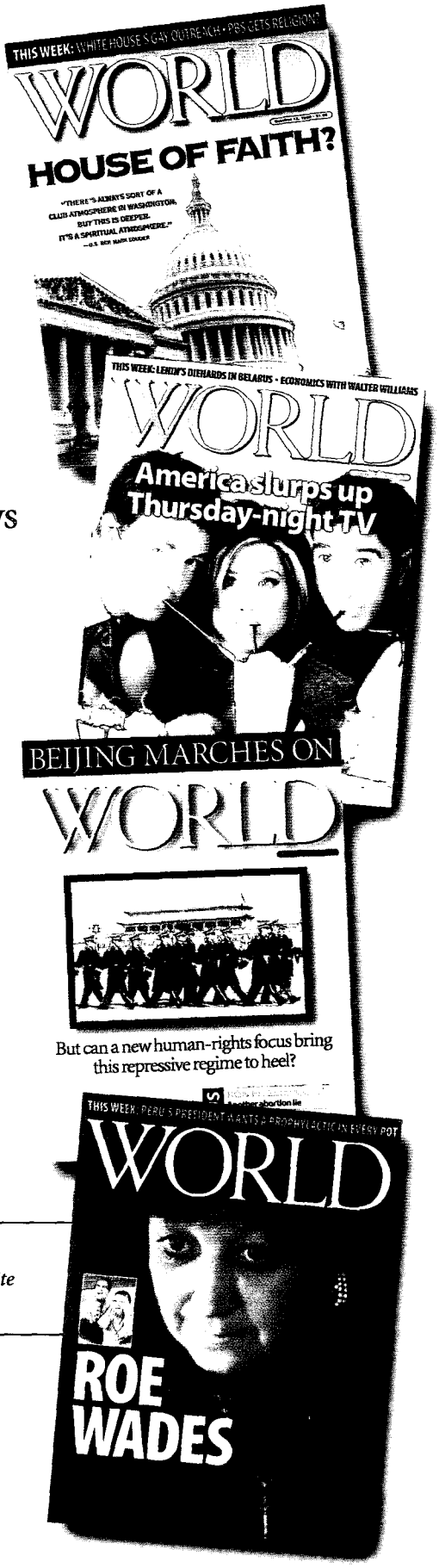
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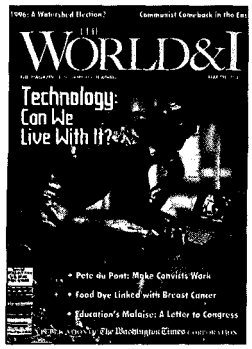
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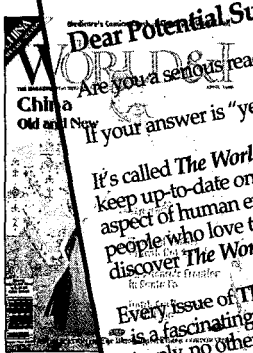

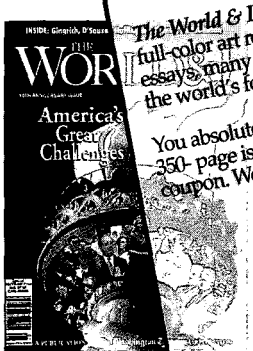

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